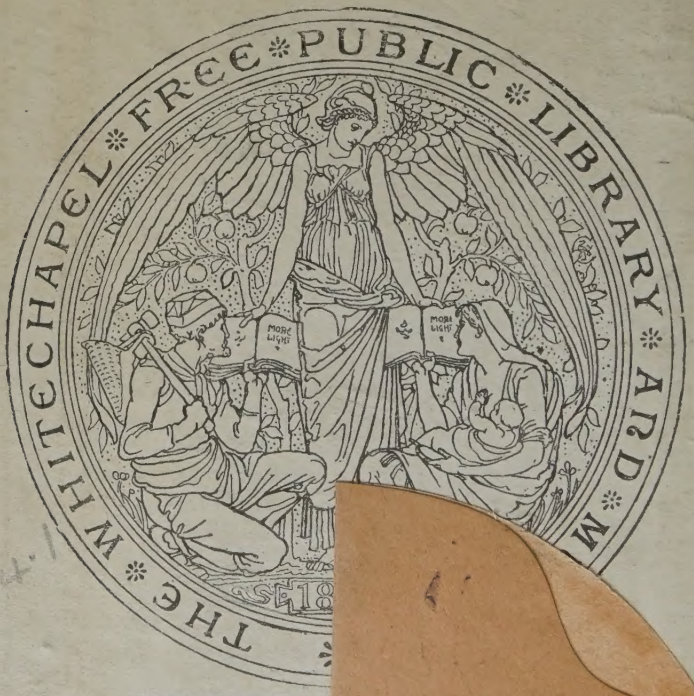
CRASHIE HOWE
A HILL PARISH

BERTRAM SMITH

Metropolitan Borough of Stepney Public Libraries.



LENDING D
D22211
Class 914.10
6007—5 21

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM
LIBRARY SERVICE

Author

Title

BOOK STORE

Books or discs must be returned on or before the last date stamped on label or on card in book pocket. Books or discs can be renewed by telephone, letter or personal call unless required by another reader. After library hours use the Ansafone Service (01-698 7347). For hours of opening and charges see notices at the above branch, but note that all lending departments close at 1 pm on Wednesday and all libraries are closed on Sundays, Good Friday, Christmas Day, Bank Holidays and Saturdays prior to Bank Holidays.

METROPOLITAN
SPECIAL COLLECTION

CRASHIE HOWE

CRASHIE HOWE

A HILL PARISH

13987

BY

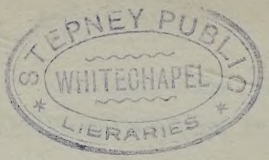
BERTRAM SMITH

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL
HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LTD.
1921

D 22211
914.10
28942



First Published, January 1921

MSC
V000-17
Gal

Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	7
I.	THE VALLEY	17
II.	A POSITION OF INFLUENCE	28
III.	THE DEEDLER	40
IV.	A DEAL	49
V.	BLOOM	58
VI.	THE TROUBLE	66
VII.	THE SEVEN STAGES OF THE HILLS	72
VIII.	PAYMENT IN KIND	79
IX.	INDOMITABLE MEG	85
X.	THOUGHT AND WORD	95
XI.	THE FIRST ICE	104
XII.	MY OLD "BACK-HAND"	113
XIII.	WEATHER-WISE	119

PAGE

XIV. Famine in the Uplands . . 127

XV. The Spate 135

XVI. A Traffic Expert . . . 144

XVII. The Last Load 149

XVIII. A Misunderstanding . . . 160

XIX. The Banker 169

XX. Two Exiles 177

XXI. The Herd of Minnygap . . 186

XXII. A Matter of Moment . . 197

XXIII. When the Belgians Came . . 208

INTRODUCTION

This book is an intimate study in Scottish rural life. Its peculiarity is that it was written by one who might fairly call himself an Englishman.

From Mr Ward Muir's admirable Introduction to "Running Wild" we learn the main facts in a remarkable career. Bertram Smith was born at New Brighton, Cheshire, in 1876. His life was a gallant fight against consumption. In spite of his physical weakness and the burdens it imposed upon him he was a man of most energetic and audacious adventures. As a youth he worked in a firm of cotton-brokers in Liverpool. But he was no typical business man, for he combined caravanning and cotton-broking. He

caravanned from the Border to John o' Groats. He was the first to perceive that the upper regions of our northern rivers were navigable. Accompanied by a congenial crew he floated in a flat-bottomed craft of his own construction down the Tweed, Annan, Nith and South Esk. He loved shooting and swimming and tenting and walking and winter-sport. He was also a passionate devotee of music. He found it necessary to make his home at Beattock, in Dumfriesshire, where he took up farming. This is all the clue we have to the locality of Crashie Howe, but the hill parish may probably still be identified. Mr Smith soon became known in that region. He might be seen striding along the roads beside his caravan, and his death was hastened by the self-sacrificing enthusiasm with which he engaged in food-production work, the popularization of ploughing by tractor,

the housing of Belgian refugees, and similar measures of war-time.

But he will be best remembered by his literary and journalistic work. To the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* he was well known, and many of them learned to look for his characteristic papers. He was also a constant contributor to *Punch* and to *Country Life*. He was Special Correspondent to the *Scotsman* at the curling Bonspiels in the Alps. To his local paper he contributed week after week in the War a careful summary of the military situation. He read vastly in the daily newspapers and in the reviews. But perhaps he was more engrossed by curling than by anything else. Mr Ward Muir says that perhaps no one else has ever been really readable about curling. The book I am introducing gives full evidence of that. In spite of all his gaiety and gallantry and achievement he fought a

losing battle, and though almost to the end he retained the appearance of a man in full vigour his allotted time was short. He died at forty-one.

Turning from Mr Ward Muir to "Crashie Howe: A Hill Parish," certain arresting features are easily discovered. Bertram Smith in these sketches puts himself in the category of those who have tried to tell the story, sometimes noble, sometimes ignoble, of Scottish country life. Certain parts of the subject he deliberately leaves alone. In the Upper Parish of Crashie life is entirely free from any burden of perplexity. "We are seldom face to face with an alternative, and the very faculty of making choice is almost lost to us through long disuse. We have one church, one school, one shop, one road. Broadly speaking, we have but one industry, one form of recreation. We are all curlers when the frost comes, and

we are all, directly or sympathetically, interested in sheep."

Bertram Smith's book is without any love interest. Most Scottish writers, if they were confined to regions where only one church exists and where love is kept carefully in the background, would feel deprived of their chief subjects. But Bertram Smith shows that a most interesting, vivid and convincing picture of Scottish life can be set forth within the limits which he deliberately chose.

His interests, as it appears to me, were mainly in what may be called the elements —scenery and weather. Next came his great love for animals. Last came the sketches of the more notable characters to be found in that countryside.

(1) Bertram was all his life an avowed lover of the rain. He had in childhood, and never could lose, the feeling it was

a pity it should stop snowing. Spates, strong winds, low temperatures, gave him a noble thrill of pride. Glorious and overpowering scenes mark a great spate. There was a wild delirium in these living waters. There was delight on the morrow if the sun shone in the glen, for now the waters were a wondrous blend of golden amber and reflected blue, a colour beyond words.

I need not quote from the wonderful chapter, " The Seven Stages of the Hills." It is full of the most delicate observation. In all their stages Bertram Smith loved the hills. He had no need of pictures on his walls when the wide panorama of the silent mountains stretched before his eyes.

(2) We have much in these pages about the sheep. There is true and unforced pathos in the chapter called " Famine in

the Uplands." But I prefer to say a word on one of the most human of these sketches, that called "The Last Load." It describes Auld Blackie, a wonderful old mare well advanced in her fourth decade, shapeless, broken and ungainly. Her owner, James Sloan of Dreepside, is not an unthrifty man, but he makes the mare comfortable, and the poor animal is well contented with her lot. The author describes how the mare was in old days indomitably plucky, determined not to fail, and how she revived in her last days and by her rally of strength dragged the contractor's great van with its load of furniture right through the gate, across the yard, and up the drive to the front door beyond. The farmer was so carried away as to register a rash vow. He said: "She'll be keepit like a lady the rest o' her days." "And James Sloan is a terrible

honest man and would never break his word to man or beast."

(3) It is not necessary to dwell on the character sketches so firmly and clearly and memorably drawn in these pages. Mr Bertram Smith knew that there is generally one great event in monotonous lives out of which come many results. For the sake of one deed or even one saying many live not altogether in vain. Crashie Howe is ruled by the shop at the bridge, or rather by Aggie the shop-keeper. She has succeeded her mother and made the shop a powerful instrument of government.

Bertram Smith has a well-deserved appreciation of the great patient and silent courage with which Scottish peasants meet the ills of life. But he does not find much beauty or softness in the Scottish char-

acter. He might go deeper, but he has deliberately chosen his standpoint, and no qualified reader will dispute that he is fair and faithful in his reports and delineation. "Crashie Howe" is a book to be read and remembered.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

HAMPSTEAD
October 1920

22211

CRASHIE HOWE

A HILL PARISH

I

THE VALLEY

Crashie Howe is splendidly unaffected by the passing of the years. All the best of it is remotely shut away. Below the great bend in Crashie Water, where it swerves round the foot of the Lang Brae and swings the course of the valley to the south-west, the prospect opens up a little. Birches and willows and a widening strip of meadow-land appear by the water-side. Heather and bracken give place to patches of crop, with small plantations here and there; and by the time we reach the lodge of the Big

House the road is closely overarched with beeches. But there, we are already near the junction of our river with the Water of Dreep, which, in company with the high road and the railway, flows down the wider valley on the west. The railway is beyond our march on the far side of the river, but a full mile of the road belongs to us and keeps us in slender touch with the traffic of the world beyond. There is a dotted line of cottages where the roads meet. We look upon them as a pushing population down there, and they have recently achieved a post office, under the name of Waterfoot, and are talking openly of a station on the line to take the place of the grass-grown siding and ancient sheep-pens beyond the bridge that have so far fulfilled our only claim to railway service. But Waterfoot —so called—with all its pretensions and despite the density of its population, will

never take the lead as heart and head of the parish so long as kirk and school and shop are far away. The Lower Parish is a mere outer fringe, a link between the heather and the plough.

If you were to stand on the bridge over the Crashie Water, five miles above the bend, and look about you, I suppose that there would be nothing in the whole expanse of your view—not even a telegraph pole or a slab of corrugated iron—that might not have been there a hundred years ago. For we of the Upper Parish enjoy all the special benefits of living out of sight, at the end of a road that leads to nowhere. Thus it comes about that our life is entirely free from any burden of perplexity. We are seldom face to face with an alternative, and the very faculty of making choice is almost lost to us through long disuse. We have one church, one school, one

shop, one road. Broadly speaking, we have but one industry, one form of recreation. We are all curlers when the frost comes, and we are all, directly or sympathetically, interested in sheep.

Of all the wide range of divers occupations grouped under the common name of farming, there is none more natural and straightforward than ours. There are a few cows about the steading and a few young cattle perhaps summering on the hill, but for the most part our life-work consists in tending, shearing, dipping, lambing, and drawing sheep. Our problems are those of heather-burning, fighting the spread of bracken, draining sour and stagnant places: we have our rough late hay crops to harvest here and there, our only insurance against days of winter storm: we have our peats to cut, our bridges to keep up: we have to be familiar with the good and evil

properties of miles of barbarous pasturage. For we act as benevolent dictator to a widely scattered population, which changes only as one generation follows another—though it is true that we anticipate by a year or two the coming of old age when we draw out the "crocks" every autumn.

Sheep farming is redeemed from monotony by the grand scale on which it is practised, and gains dignity from its exalted neighbourhood of crag and hill and heather. Our land in Crashie Howe is not parcelled out or measured or enclosed. Often the march between one farm and another is no more than an unseen line across the moor, well known to the wise sheep on either hand. We do not deal in acres, but reckon in the lump, by hills and hirsels. There are eight hill farms in Crashie Howe, and although the dwelling-houses are all to

be seen from some point on the road, the outer marches of many of them are miles away beyond the sky-line, and even the rounded height of Holmfell, the crown of the mounting mass of hills at the head of the valley, is well within our frontiers.

Drumshaws lies at the foot of the Lang Brae, on the right of the stream. It is a squat little house, with a low range of buildings about it, encircled by a ring of scraggy spruce trees. The hill rises steeply behind the steading, and there are generally a few Highland cattle to be seen, walking the heather with a princely air. But it is not strictly a hill farm, for it has also a broad stretch of arable by the water-side. Broomsburn, which is half a mile further on, is close to the road. The house lies in the mouth of a steep gully, packed in by a young larch plantation and beautifully sheltered.

There is a tiny meadow in the flat triangle by the road where the burn runs clear over gravel, and there are always roses in the garden. It is not a big farm, Broomsburn, but it carries a healthy stock. On the opposite side of the water, beyond Peter's Moss, high on a little open plateau, lies the great farm-steading of Earlscleugh. Bare and bleak and wind-swept as it is—and there is neither tree nor bush about it—it has yet an air of comfort and prosperity, with its fine two-gabled house and square of snow-white buildings. It carries two hundred score of sheep, no less, and the Earlscleugh Top lambs are pretty safe to head the market at the August sales, for it has the very best of pasturage.

There are two other little farms on the far side of the water—Fingland and Polnackie—each with a narrow strip of hill behind them. They are both in the

hands of Alec Quigley, the road surveyor, at present, and consequently suffer neglect. For Alec lives at Waterfoot, and is kept pretty busy with other affairs. Pitglassie, on the near side, is one of our best farms, with a famous Black-faced hill beyond the sky-line. There are now no other Black-faced sheep in the valley except on Scroggs, though Broomsburn has only adopted a Cheviot stock in recent years. As we at last approach the bridge we come in full view of Shortrigg, which stands for our low-water mark as a farming community. Shortrigg has seen better days. Its gates are forlorn and decrepit, its dykes are tattered in many places. Its dull-grey walls cry out in vain, with each succeeding spring, for whitewash. Calves wander at will in the yard and garden, and you are sure to find a broken implement by the stable door. We are, in a word, heartily

ashamed of Shortrigg. It is a "lairdship": that is to say, it belongs to the man who farms it, who will tell you that he has a perfect right to do what he will with his own; but Davie Nichol is no credit to the valley and there is no excuse for him. It was a well-kept farm in his father's day.

And, finally, a mile above the bridge, high among the foot-hills at the very head of the valley, lies the farm of Scroggs, shut in by the wide amphitheatre of sweeping hills and overlooking the whole stretch of the Upper Parish. The farmer of Scroggs has need to be an active man, for it is a day's journey to "the back of the land," and he must climb a thousand feet and more, to the very summit of Holmfell, in the course of it. Three great gullies, like the spokes of a fan, lead the way from the level of the house to the flats above. Each of them has

its tiny leaping cataracts and hidden pools, where sure-footed little rowan trees cling to the naked rocks, and rich green verdure in the open stretches. For the rest, Scroggs is all heather land; it is a far-famed grouse moor, and fine bags are often made at the line of butts between Holmfell and Minnygap.

The farms of Crashie Howe may well appear remote from agriculture as it is known in richer and more fertile lands. But here also the proper seasons come and go. There is the anxious lambing time, when we go out to find new faces every morning: the clamorous clipping time, when neighbours gather to take part from far and near. There are the days of mist and driving rain, when we must find our way as best we can. There are the days of early summer, when the stock moves forward through a land of plenty and need not seek and forage far

and wide. There is the dreaded visitation of the snow, which may bring troubles fast and thick upon us, when the hill becomes a weary treadmill and the wreaths gather deep in the gullies.

There can be no monotony for those who believe—as we believe in Crashie Howe—that the proper study of mankind is sheep.

II

A POSITION OF INFLUENCE

It is difficult to imagine what would become of the social life of Crashie Howe or how, indeed, existence would be tolerable at all, without the Shop. Were it to be closed, no doubt we could find some means of supplying the necessities of life. Willie Crawford, the carrier from Newcastleton, comes twice a week, and, after all, the railway station at Dalwoodie is but nine miles away. We need not starve; but I shudder to think of the stagnation and eclipse of all our higher faculties that would ensue. For although the shop existed in the first place, no doubt, for the exchange of commodities—like any

other shop—that side of its usefulness has been far outrun by broader and more beneficent activities. It was not so in the days of old Mrs Armstrong. To the age of eighty-three she served the valley faithfully within the scope of her stock-in-trade; but the rise of this new power dates from the accession of Aggie, her niece.

For fully twenty years Aggie has been extending her sway far and wide over the parish, till it is hardly too much to say that she rules the destinies of the entire population from Crashie Bridge to Waterfoot. I do not know what the success of the shop may be as a business concern, but as a powerful instrument of government it commands respect. These ends are not attained without ceaseless devotion to the cares of office. I do not think I have ever seen Aggie, except on Sundays, outside her own door. She

must spend twelve or fourteen hours a day behind the counter, and she was never known to take a holiday, until the passing of a benevolent Act of Parliament, some years ago, which forced her to put up her shutters one afternoon a week. That has been a great trial for her. She is getting used to it, she says. But even now she looks forward with distaste to Wednesdays, when the cheerful stream of her customers is shut off and she finds herself marooned in silence and semi-darkness. She does not, of course, leave the shop even then; she tidies her shelves. Aggie has no fixed meals. The tea-pot stands on the hob in the corner behind the counter, and she takes a bite from time to time as her affairs permit.

The truth is, although we should be very sorry to confess to so absurd a sentiment, that we are very proud of the shop. For Aggie, with her undoubted

gifts and unfailing devotion, is a true Servant of the Public. Her business has grown out of all proportion to the cottage she lives in, and even with the increasing straggle of little sheds at the back she is grossly overcrowded. Yet when a far better house was offered to her two years ago she refused to move. Her present shop is within half a mile of the bridge, on the south side. The great majority of her customers live on the south side, and the new cottage was in an excellent position about three miles down the water—below Pitglassie. But Aggie had thought it out. She concluded that if she were to move she would be favouring the south side at the expense of the north. It was nothing to her if all her "travellers" and all her many goods that came by rail had three miles cut off their journey up the valley. For how were the people on the north side to get supplies, without a long detour,

in time of flood? There is, of course, a ford across the Crashie Water at Broomsburn; and ever since a daughter of Pitglassie married the Fingland shepherd, traffic over the river there has been carried on by stilts. (We used to use two wooden chairs at one time, standing on one while we advanced the other, and moving forward step by step.) But when the Crashie Water is in spate, as it so often is, neither fords nor stilts are of much avail; and in any case, with a heavily laden basket . . . perhaps containing eggs . . .

No. Aggie's place was at the Bridge. She was perfectly clear about it. No change was possible that upset the balance of her even-handed justice to north and south alike. And there she still remains.

And now, if you will seat yourself on a sack of oatmeal in the corner of the shop (and you will find it not uncom-

fortable), we may study Aggie's methods for an hour. Here comes a little girl whose chin barely reaches to the counter when she stands on tip-toe, and who presents a halfpenny adhering to a grimy hand. I am afraid she is terrorized by our presence, but with much patience and stooping low to catch her hoarse little whisper, Aggie elicits at last the nature of her demand. . . . "Happenny's worth o' shoogar-alley." (I have no idea what it is.) Next comes the portly Mrs Sproat of Drumshaws, with two great baskets and a linen cloth to wrap the bread in. This is a long transaction; it is a question of the daily needs of a whole week; and she goes away loaded with a striking assortment of goods, from note-paper and boot-laces to bird-seed and household stores. For Aggie aims at being a universal provider. She does not at all like to be asked for anything that she has not

got in stock. When any such outlandish demand is made upon her she replies with a quiet dignity, which suggests that if it is not to be had in her shop it is a thing that any inhabitant of Crashie Howe can do very well without, and the rash inquirer goes away with a sense of having committed an indiscretion. A "traveller" on a bicycle next appears, and if there has been any complaint about the last goods he supplied he cuts a poor figure before Aggie's withering criticism—although when it is over he is quite safe to get another order, after having come so far. And so the stream goes on. Eggs and butter arrive from Polnackie or Shortrigg; Crawford, the carrier, pulls up and deposits a box of kippers if it be a Friday, or "haddies" if it be a Tuesday. (No one would dream of eating fish in Crashie Howe, unless they be trout from the burn, except on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

That tradition dates back to the days of Mrs Armstrong.) A tramp loafs in for a halfpennyworth of tea and a pennyworth of tobacco—both swiftly estimated without the help of scales. A shepherd asks for a lambing flask. There is hardly a breathing-space. The children who come on errands from long distances are always rewarded from the peppermint drawer with "Here's a bit sweetie to yersel'"; and all the time Aggie is performing feats of mathematics in her head and adding up long lists of varied purchases. She is no believer in pencils and paper, and we have given up trying to follow her swift calculations and never question the results.

But buying and selling are but the groundwork of the day's business. There is a superstructure of more subtle things. Aggie is a provider not only of tobacco and shoogar-alley, but of advice, sym-

pathy, and, above all, information. She holds in her hands the threads of communication. If anyone has a secret to tell or a question to ask or a rumour to verify, news to publish or opinions to express, he makes a bee-line for the shop. There is hardly one of her customers from whom Aggie does not get something to add to her store of knowledge, and thus it is that—though she never crosses the threshold of her door—she is in closest touch with all the happenings of the country-side. If there is anything to be published broadcast through the parish it is well to tell Aggie early in the day, and it will reach even the outlying shepherds' cottages before night. But besides being an information bureau, the shop is a lost property office, a servants' registry and advertising medium, a clearing-house, and to some extent a bank and a club. And when, as many

do, you seek Aggie's sympathy and advice in any difficulty, she will not suspend operations to take you aside and confer about the matter, but, as she weighs out the sugar or fumbles for her tethered scissors to cut the string, in the course of a few pithy sentences she will throw light on your dilemma or comfort your bruised spirit.

Less fortunate parishes which do not possess a dictator such as ours have to appoint committees to conduct many of their affairs. But we leave them in the safe hands of Aggie Armstrong. If a concert is to be organized to assist the widow of Tom Halliday, who was drowned in the great flood last winter, you have only to enlist the ready sympathy of Aggie and you may rest assured of a full house. She will make the parish absorb an amazing number of tickets in the course of a week along with their

tea and bacon. The new library could not have been worked at all without her help in exchanging books. And when the Belgians came. . . . But I must leave the Belgians for the present.

Once upon a time came a misguided grocer to Crashie Howe and opened what he was pleased to call "The Cyclists' Rest," on the opposite side of the road, for the sale of mineral waters and other things. There ought to be room for two, he said. We were sorry for him, for he had never lived in Crashie Howe and he did not understand. The dust lay thick on his stock-in-trade before he gave it up and moved away, but Aggie took it over at a generous valuation and privately organized a subscription to give him another start in life.

It is true that we have a Parish Council and a School Board, a Registrar and Inspector of Poor, and a complete outfit

of local government. We regard them all with good-humoured tolerance. For we know that we are in no need of constituted authority in Crashie Howe. We are well content to be ruled by the Shop.

III

THE DEEDLER

There is no room in the twentieth century for the deedler. It is many years since he vanished from the remote country districts of Scotland, where once his art was held in high esteem. He was never fitted to compete with the village fiddler, who now fills his place. Indeed, even in the brightest days of his usefulness and popularity he knew himself to be no better than a makeshift and a substitute. He could not hold his own against the fiddler; he could not even hold his own against a penny-whistle, in practised hands. His was a utility performance; it served its purpose, but

even the most enthusiastic of his patrons never classed it quite as music. And yet as I look back to days of long ago my heart goes out to the deedler. I would not let his memory die, for surely this is one of the most extraordinary accomplishments ever practised by man, both in the fact that it was pursued with earnestness and method and in that it really was of solid service to his fellows.

Deedling was the natural outcome of a lack of musical resources. In small villages among the hills, such as ours, there was no means of making music except by song, but dancing always flourished. It is manifest that one cannot dance with profit or with vigour in solemn silence. By natural causes the dancers or the onlookers would be brought to lift up their voice in melody, and the art of deedling took shape.

That may well have been the germ

from which it sprang, and it is clear that promiscuous and ungoverned deedling by all and sundry could only bring confusion of time and melody, so that the provision of adequate vocal support was at last undertaken by a single performer, whose temperament and special gifts of mind and body best fitted him for the post. And so the race of deedlers grew up, and those of them with outstanding talent earned wide reputation and found themselves in constant demand. When a dance was projected an effort might be made in the first place to get "music" in one form or another, but when that failed the deedler was sought out and called to his arduous office.

Deedling is not singing, and it clearly is not humming. For the essence of humming is that the mouth is shut. It is perhaps the most primitive form of emitting rhythmical sound. By the simple

and continuous rise and fall of the tongue against the roof of the mouth the notes are given out to unchanging syllables, repeated indefinitely — "Deedle-deedle-deedle-dee." The lines of melody may thus be followed, not very closely perhaps, but recognizably. These syllables are primeval and inevitable. If one must make any sound with the tongue against the roof of the mouth—any varied and consecutive sound—that sound can be no other than deedle-dee. The art cannot, therefore, have been difficult to acquire in its simplest form. But by long practice and studious cultivation one's powers in this direction, though themselves a gift of nature, could be greatly strengthened and matured. There was all the difference in the world between a finished artist and a tyro.

I do not think that great musical abilities were called for in order to attain

distinction, so long as one could infallibly distinguish between one tune and another, for monotony was the chief pitfall to be avoided. A repertoire was essential : the other main requirement was lung-power. To keep it up—a constant and unfailing strain, sounding clear above the shuffle of many feet, lasting in triumphant bursts of some ten minutes' duration through the long hours of the night and coming in at the finish *fortissimo*—these were the great feats of endurance within the scope of the deedlers of old.

I have said that the sound was produced by the action of the tongue on the roof of the mouth, but that is only a part of the truth. The whole body, by magnificent contortions, contributed to the result. The mere amateur may discover for himself, if he will utter a few notes, that there is something in the act of deedling that tends to set

the limbs a-twitching. Before one has reached the third bar, if one gives way to impulse, the head begins to jog from side to side and a sort of restlessness takes possession of the knees. If one were to throw one's heart into it one would soon be jigging about like a marionette. To deedle in a rigid attitude is ridiculous. It may well be said that to deedle at all is ridiculous, but if it is to be done it demands complete abandonment.

I like to picture and reconstruct the scene in the barn or school-house where the young men are seeking "partners" for the reel. Raised on a platform at the far end is the massive form of the deedler, clearing his throat and squaring his shoulders in preparation. When all are ready his voice is lifted up like a trumpet-call, while a look of unshaken gravity rests upon his features, for you cannot deedle if you are disposed to

smile. With his whole soul he plies his art, throwing in all his resources as he calls forth rhythm from the motion of his head, a jaunty expression from his bobbing knees, emphasis from swaying arms. At last, with a final Dee-dee-dee *fortissimo rallentando*, the dance is over, and, like a boxer at the end of a round, he relapses into a chair, while willing hands press upon him the foaming draught that he has earned so well. It was a point of honour to hold out single-handed for the whole night, even at the cost of want of voice for days to follow. I am told that there were cases of concerted deedling, when no outstanding performer had been forthcoming, but deedling in its purest and most impressive form was essentially a solo.

There is an old lady in Crashie Howe, who lives in the cottage of Thrummie Rigg at the foot of the Scroggs road,

from whom I have learned much of former days in the parish. Mrs Cairns is over eighty years of age, and deedling was already dying out when she was young, but she well remembers the fame and following of one Rob Kirkpatrick, farmer in those days of Polnackie, who shed great lustre on the neighbourhood by his unchallenged claims to supremacy. In his youth he travelled far and wide, making possible many a night of merriment and good-fellowship, but as time went on and he came to recognize his worth it was hard to tempt him from his own fireside. He rather affected to make little of the art of deedling—which was merely a pose upon his part—and it needed much flattery and persuasion to rouse him to action. There was some talk of his taking pupils at one time, though Mrs Cairns herself considered that rather a daft idea.

He was an old man when she knew him, and it is still matter of keen regret to her that he did not live long enough to fulfil a promise he had made her as a child to come out of his retirement and deedle at her wedding.

IV

A DEAL

James Sloan of Dreepside is what we call a terribly honest man. He has always had that reputation, as his father had before him. We look upon our neighbours all up and down the valley as honest in the usual degree—or perhaps a little beyond that standard, for ours is a favoured neighbourhood. But the honesty of the Sloans, for some reason, stands by itself as a thing beyond everyday experience. Well do I remember the old man, with the beard of a patriarch, taking charge of the "gate" at the Annual Sports at Waterfoot, always willing to stand there all day in any weather (and miss all the

fun), in the proud knowledge that his selection for the post was a public recognition of integrity. But the Sloans, although honest without question, are not easy to deal with. They are hard buyers and slow sellers, and the driving of a bargain is with them a matter of effort long sustained. No one knows better than Jock Hepburn, the butcher from Dalwoodie, that it is well to start early in the day if you want to buy sheep off Dreepside.

I saw him leave his bicycle at the gate and stride into the yard, and as I am always welcome at Dreepside I followed him to the pens at the back of the steading. There was old James, wedged in among his sheep, wearing that careless and detached expression that means that his whole soul is concentrated upon the problem of selling to advantage. Jock nodded to him pleasantly.

"Grand turn o' weather we're havin'," he remarked. And the conversation ran for a while on general topics. I climbed up on the dyke and lit my pipe. At last:

"Ye've brocht the sheep in, I see," said Jock, as though he had just noticed them.

"Hoots," said James. "I'm no carin' aboot sellin' the sheep the day. I was ettlin' tae keep them on a while. They're aye improving, and I've plenty turnips yet. I wasna expectin' ye tae come over. I just brocht them in tae sort their feet."

The butcher begins absent-mindedly to handle and grip one or two of the Shaggy-backs that are nearest to him, while he discusses the cause of the railway accident down the line last night. He remarks that it's no a guid time to buy sheep—the weather is against them. Terrible mild weather for the time of 'ear.

I look at my watch. It is half-past nine.

Twenty minutes later the matter has so far advanced that the butcher is moving about among the sheep making a careful examination.

"They're grand sheep," he says earnestly. (It is not our custom in Crashie Howe to find fault with the goods before we make a purchase; that is regarded as a crude line of approach.) "I canna compleen o' the sheep."

"Oo, aye," says James. "They've done weel, though the reek from the railway aye spoils the look o' them. But they'll be a' the better o' anither week or two on turnips. I'm thinkin' I'll tak' them to Castle Douglas aboot the end o' the month."

There follows an interchange of disconnected remarks, thrown out with a

meditative air and addressed, one would say, to the universe in general.

"The London trade's terrible bad," says the butcher, as one who thinks aloud.

"They tell me there's an awful scarcity o' well-finished sheep the year," James observes.

"Skins is three shillings doon. It's that that's hurtin' the trade."

"There's hardly a fat sheep left in the country. The short turnip crop was bound to tell a tale."

"Wool's had a sair fall."

Jock sits down on the fence and borrows a match. He has a story to tell about the doctor's motor which takes a little time. It is recognized that the preliminary round is over and the sheep are seemingly ignored, though searching eyes are all the time anxiously assessing their value. Suddenly James looks up with something like enthusiasm.

"There's a grand hogg!" he asserts, singling out one from the crowd. "That's the class o' sheep for the Castle Douglas mart."

"Aye," says Jock again. "They're grand sheep. Pit them oot in the field, James. I ken fine how they touch. Let's see them gaun aboot."

The scene of the comedy is now transferred to the paddock, and the two combatants walk back and forward, while a thoughtful dog keeps them in touch with the flock. It is now after eleven o'clock and the crisis is at hand.

"What are ye wantin' for them, James?" says the butcher.

"Weel,"—James is rather taken aback at so blunt a question,—"what'll they be worth to you, Jock?"

These are questions that do not admit of a direct reply. It is not possible to proceed without further preparation of

the ground. James has to explain that last year he sold his first draw for 42s., and that they were certainly not equal to these. Jock has to tell how he bought Wullie Halliday's sheep off Braefoot last week at 33s., and they killed out nicely. . . . No, they were not perhaps as big as these . . . but still, it was a healthy bit, Braefoot. . . . Again the conversation becomes general. It is always necessary to dilute the argument when it moves too rapidly, thus gaining time for full consideration.

Finally, with all the air of a judge pronouncing sentence, James states his price—he will take 41s. for two scores of them, "seein' that it's you, Jock, and I wadna like tae disappoint ye." Jock does not at once protest, as some might do. He expresses no surprise. But after long thought he concludes more in sorrow than in resentment that—"Man, James,

ye're too high the day. I'm feared I'll no be able tae buy yer sheep." He looks at his watch. He has to go as far as Scroggs this morning, he explains, to look at a fat calf. It is time he was on the road. But he turns at the gate to inquire, as a forlorn hope, if 37s. would be of any use.

And now the battle is joined all along the line. There is a mass of possible compromise.

Will he give 40s. for one score and draw them himself ?

Will he give 39s. 6d. for thirty ?

Will he give 39s. for two score ? (Not unless James will throw in one for nothing.)

Jock rises to 38s., but must have 6d. a head luck-money if they don't kill well.

James is offering to keep them for a week if he will give 39s. for fifty, when I am called away, and when I return

about 12.15 I see the form of the butcher disappearing over the hill on his bicycle. James is in high feather.

"Thirty-eight shillings and ninepence for forty-five," he tells me. "They'd never a made thirty-five at Castle Douglas. And no expense! It's a grand plan tae sell at hame. But of course I kent fine he needed them."

I met Jock coming down the valley as I went home and gathered his opinion.

"They were terrible cheap sheep. But I kent he had tae pairt wi' them. He couldna help himsel'. He had no keep. He'll be needin' all his turnips for the ewes."

V

BLOOM

If you were to stray into our valley in the early days of August and travel the whole length of the hill road it is likely that sooner or later you would be struck by a factor in the landscape that called for explanation. There are some who do not notice these things, but they belong to the class of people who have never discovered that there are numbers on telegraph poles; or that the low winter sun creeps far into the spruce woods, which are dark and gloomy as a dungeon in high summer; or that larch trees have red blossoms; or even that starlings perch on the backs of sheep. Such people are

only fit to roll about in motor cars from one town to another. But if you have a seeing eye you will very soon appreciate that there is something unusual in the aspect of the lambs dotted and powdered far over the sweeping hills. The great part of them are what hill sheep should be—of an indeterminate greyish white colour. But there are others, of a brighter, fresher tint and more distinguished air, that stand out in dainty contrast. You will gather at once, no doubt, that they are destined for the auction mart, but you are even then only on the fringe of the inquiry, for you have yet to learn of the significance, the subtle power, the elusive charm of what is known as "Bloom."

We speak of the bloom on a peach or a bunch of grapes, and it seems a far cry from that velvet surface to the shaggy back of a mountain sheep. Yet

the special treatment that will make them show well in the selling ring is a ponderable factor in determining the price. When we have done all we can to breed and feed and draw the season's lambs for the best, there still remains this touch of artistry that crowns our work.

The colour of a lamb, under the eye of the buyer, is an extremely delicate matter, and one that may be influenced by unexpected causes. It is not easy, perhaps, for you to believe that the smoke from a single line of railway, crossing the wide space of the open moor, can leave its mark upon them. Yet it is an established fact that farms within range of the railway produce lambs of a blue dead colour, apt subjects for skilled treatment. That is where Dreepside suffers. James often complains that the railway robs him of a shilling a head in value. We of the

Upper Valley are spared this handicap. Then again, a black lamb invariably looks larger than it is. A blue mark is dangerous (though it is used by some), and green must be avoided at all costs. A lamb will be visibly shrunk in size and lose distinction of aspect if touched with green. But a bright red spot on the back of the neck will do no harm.

But it is not a question of distinguishing marks. The whole fleece must be carefully tempered. And it is our hereditary belief that a clear cream or rich yellow is always ennobling, and a lamb will both grow in beauty and expand in size under a dull and even terra-cotta. This great art is not confined by strict, immutable laws. The perfect bloom of one year will not always serve for the year that follows. We are governed by fashion. There are periods of high colour and periods of restraint. And there are

many pitfalls. If the accepted limits be overstepped—if there is anything "loud" and garish about one's lambs—it were almost better to bring them home to be dressed anew than to put them through the ring. It takes a master-hand to impart that perfect finish which no buyer can withstand. For even a butcher may have an eye for higher things; he is not solely a man of blood.

Cynical persons may no doubt dismiss this gentle practice as a trick of the trade. But it is more than that. We do not try to misrepresent or hide defects. And there is an inherent fitness in the thing. For the lambs are coloured by the earth itself. If you try to use any foreign pigment that is alien to their life the note will be inevitably wrong. Their appearance will be artificial; they will never "fill the eye."

Above all, I like to watch Dreepside at

work on this strange rite. His are half-bred lambs, always the finest subjects, and, as I have said, he has the railway to contend with. The lambs are being drawn —a long and earnest process that calls for agonies of thought. The rejected have already made their way back to the hill and waiting mothers, and James is rummaging among his chosen "Tops" for that one elusive lamb which, if he is not discovered, will spoil the level of the whole draw. (This intruder always shows himself actively on the outside of the crowd on their appearance in the ring.) At last he is discovered and cast out, and the rest are penned closer and closer, till nothing appears but an undulating carpet of wool, spangled over with upturned faces.

Early that morning James has sent a cart, possibly a distance of several miles, to some treasured bank of good red till

or clay that he has used for years for this sole purpose. The clay is flung into a barrel, mixed with water, and stirred about into a red, frothy, uninviting liquid. This is then discharged lavishly on the close-packed backs from an ancient watering-pot, till all his patient subjects are blinking and bedraggled. And here you must look forward with the eye of faith. This is but the first dressing. A week of varied weather takes effect before the second. But already, as the lambs go free and move off up the hill, we may admit that they have gained something in appearance.

If we return on the evening before the sale we shall find a quaint and pretty scene, for the small, white, upturned faces are being washed, each in its turn, with soap, a scrubbing-brush, and a basin of warm water. We are now in the final throes. The colouring has done its work,

fresh-washed faces glisten in the evening light, rebellious tufts of wool have been cropped away. For the last time the small elusive lamb that will suddenly appear to spoil the lot has been eradicated. But James is not quite satisfied. As the dusk falls we leave him cogitating on some last perfect touch that shall wring an extra sixpence from a half-reluctant buyer on the morrow when the bidding faints and fails.

VI

THE TROUBLE

The dusk was already falling as I came round the bend on to the open moor, and there was no living thing in sight except the figure of a man in front of me striding up into the mist. Even at that distance I recognized the long and even stride of Tam Murray, shepherd of Polnackie, and quickened my pace to overtake him. I reflected that I had not seen Tam for some weeks, and that even on the last occasion he had turned off the road abruptly to avoid me . . . and it was almost a month since he had been to church. For perhaps a mile and a half I slowly overhauled him, and at last we

came abreast. It was so dark by this time that I could not see his face, but the tone in which he replied to my greeting told me that all was not well. For old Tam is a cheery, open-hearted soul by no means given to reticence. I could make nothing of him to-night beyond a "Yes" or "No" or "Ye may weel say that" or "Surely," or some such short cut back to silence. At last we came to the Polnackie road-end and I proposed to come up with him for a cup of tea. And then I could see that I had put him in a dilemma and he could keep his secret no longer.

"Ye'll maybe no ha' haird onything aboot my trouble?" he asked.

"Nothing," said I, and went on to ask if all were well with his wife and the two small grand-children that lived with them.

"Hoots, man!" said he, impatiently,

"it's no that." He conveyed to me a curious impression that it was something that touched him much more closely.

"Ye'll no hae haird onything?" he asked again. "I daur hardly show ma face at kirk or mart the noo. But if the folk dinna ken aboot it yet, they're bound tae ken soon eneugh. I canna keep it frae them." He ended in a tone of weariness and distress, full of sorrow —more than that, full of shame and the weight of public degradation. And then —for I had seen this thing before in the valley years ago—I knew in a moment what had happened.

"Tam, it's the sheep," said I. "Ye've trouble among the ewes?"

"Aye," said he, quietly. "And it's the first time, and I've lambed thae ewes for forty 'ear."

As we climbed the hill he told me the

whole history of his calamity, and I could see that he was wounded in his most sacred feelings of pride in his work and love for the sheep among whom his life was spent. There was not one of them whose face and form and whole life's history was not familiar to him. And he was shamed and humiliated by this terrible stroke of fortune. His lambing season had been turned from a triumph into a rout. Three weeks before he had come upon the first dead lamb on the hill; there were two next day; and after that he never left the cottage without fresh evidences of the plague. With more than half his flock lambed already he had barely two score of sound lambs to show, and many of them were "wee bits o' things."

"Come ben," he said at last as we reached the door. "The wife's aye working on them, puir body, for we maun

save what we can. But ye never saw sic a sight as this in a' yer days."

And indeed I never had.

The aspect of the kitchen was that of a military hospital, improvised among unusual surroundings. There were twenty or thirty lambs gathered on the floor about the hearth, some in baskets wrapped in flannel, some in boxes. There was a small contingent on the dresser and almost every chair and table was occupied. One or two were already swaying on unsteady legs, calling plaintively. Tam's wife was moving about among them, plying a whisky bottle and a lambing flask—now passing one patient as fit to go back to its mother in the barn, now shaking her head over another that was beyond the reach of help. It was a quaint, humorous, tragic little assembly. And since he had relieved his mind of its burden, Tam was able to see humour in

the tragedy. He came upon the very smallest lamb it has ever been my lot to see, as he picked his steps among them. It had completely revived under the influence of warmth and shelter and was tottering bravely to and fro. And as he stooped to pick it up it emitted a cheerful "Me-e-e-e-eh" and gravely shook its head. Tam held it, as he would have said, "in the loof of his hand," and looked down upon it with a kindly eye.

"Well, my wee manny," he said, "I'm thinkin' ye'll be the littlest bit leevin' thing in Crashie Howe. But haud on till yer mither gets ye back again. Ye'll just need to rare up on yer hind legs when ye're wantin' a drink."

VII

THE SEVEN STAGES OF THE HILLS

I HAVE no need of pictures on my walls. From my wide, old-fashioned window I look out upon a picture, perfect in its form and outline, glorious in its wide expanse. There is no black streak of railway line to spoil my view, no blur of motor-dust marring the white ribbon of the highway. There is a grass-grown, undulating lane—the Green Loaning—that dips out of sight at the ford; there is a glimpse of Crashie Water to the left, edged with scattered birch trees; the white gable-end of the cottage by the lane; and nearer still at hand the hill-road with its stout wooden bridge across the

burn. Beyond, in a sweeping curve, stretches the wide panorama of the silent hills.

At all seasons of the year the hills are beautiful, whether they be seen only in dim pencilled outline, through the heat haze of the summer, or mottled over with chasing sun and shadow, or standing gaunt and harsh behind the driving rain. The picture may be blotted out for a day or two, through intervening mist, but I am often compensated, when at last the curtain rises, by a scene of startling brilliance wherein the far horizon is brought close to hand and every detail is clear-cut and sharp. But the glory of the outlook is in its colouring and in the seven stages that come and go with the procession of the seasons. You know but little of our hills if you have seen them in one only of their successive garments. Even in the long dead season, when there

is no new growth to clothe them, there can be no lasting monotony in their appearance. For any morning you may find them ennobled by the glittering mantle of the snow.

The first phase—of sullen grey—is very slow to change. The valleys are full of new voices of the spring, and larch and thorn are budding in the spinneys, but the wintry hills still wear the old complexion of the year that is gone. Grey bents and dark grey heather merge into each other, with here and there an ugly scar that tells of recent burning. And then, as the grass grows long in the meadows, the high hill pastures begin to change their tone. You will not mark the process day by day, but one morning it is suddenly apparent that the hills are not what they were a week ago. I think the coming of the green upon them is akin to the slow brightening of a flame.

It is not so much a change of colour as an intensifying, a reawakening of a colour that was dead. The grey tones are disappearing all the time beneath the rising tide of summer growth, splashes of vivid young bracken spring to life, and at last the hills are green. For months they frame in perfect harmony the verdant picture of the foreground.

It is late in August before the second stage sets in. There is no sign of it upon the lower slopes, but in the higher places and along the skyline to the rounded summit of Holmfell the heights begin to glow with the myriad tiny blossoms of the heather. There are ten days of grand crescendo, and early in September the climax of the summer has arrived, and you are fronted by a purple rampart, gorgeous in the blaze of the sun. There is no question but the hills are at their best in royal purple, but the splendour

is short-lived, and the fourth stage marks the coming of decay. The purple has already gone and the green has lost its vigour, but there is still a feast of beauty before the winter comes. It is by no gradual growth of living things that this change is brought about. A frosty night or two in early October will turn the bracken and light up the fading surfaces with a wealth of brown and yellow—surely the most vivid, lavish picture of them all.

Slowly the autumn storms wash out traces of growth and life; slowly the hills tone down to sullen grey. Green, purple, brown and grey—each change has brought a gentle beauty of its own. But it is left for the snow to give the hills true majesty and grandeur. Sooner or later, as the winter wears away, a dawn is bound to come when you will look out on snowfields of an exquisite purity,

and if the day be clear and frosty the distant skyline is a vision of blue and white and gold. Now it is that you can grasp the perfect grace of outline, the gently rounded slopes and sharp-cut clefts that you have never clearly seen before. And now it is that towards sunrise or sunset you may at any moment find the hill-tops touched with rose, like an echo of the Alpine "evening glow." There is a sensational element about this fifth stage of colouring. It often seems that while the valley changes not at all, for only rain has fallen on the lower level, the hills are transformed into a new thing that hardly owns connection with it.

With the thaw comes the sixth stage—a stage of black and white. For the snow still lies long in the clefts and hollow places when the sun has wiped the level surface bare; and far on into the spring little white patches, shrinking day by

day, remain, as the author of "Lorna Doone" has said, "like a lady's gloves forgotten."

The end of the year's cycle is of a different order. Early in April, before the nesting of the grouse, the period of heather-burning falls due. This time you will look for your effect by night. You can see nothing of the hills from your window, but, as it seems, far up in the sky are ragged lines of dancing flame. You can but guess which of the well-known tops they spring from—black patches on the morrow will make that clear—but the scene is weirdly beautiful. North, south, and east you are girt about by fire.

VIII

PAYMENT IN KIND

The Black Dubs, Watty Hepburn's small holding, lies between the river and the road just above Waterfoot. It is only about a dozen acres in extent, and is not therefore in itself a livelihood, but it gives Watty a fine sense of proprietorship in such agricultural discussions as take place every Sunday in the kirkyard before the bell begins to ring. He was a dyker to trade in his more active years, and when the weather was good and he felt so disposed he used to share with Archie Marchbank the work of repairing gaps in the ancient dry-stone walls that run headlong down our steep hill-sides and for

uncounted miles across the lonely moors —a heritage of patient and laborious days of long ago. But it is not as a farmer or a dyker that Watty has won distinction in the parish. He has acquired by patient application an unrivalled mastery of the scissors. Taking the shearing of sheep as his starting-point and faithfully following his bent, he has risen step by step from the clipping of horses to that of small boys, till at last he has qualified to operate upon his fellow-man ; and now in the closing years of his life he has this field of hair-cutting entirely to himself.

Watty is a true enthusiast. It is a pleasure to see him at work in the granary behind the cottage, with his keen old eyes intent upon the matter in hand and his ponderous scissors cautiously carving their way. If his methods are uncomfortable—and he has little more respect

for the feelings of his raw material than a joiner engaged in rounding off the head of a gate-post—the result is worth it all. All the painful period of twisting, thumbing and jerking is forgotten in the moment of happy fruition at the mirror that hangs at the back of the door.

It is generally recognized that, though he does sound work upon his adult clients, Watty's most startling transformations are wrought upon the heads of boys. He will lay down his scissors with a sigh and hold the newly-cropped at arm's length between his knees, contemplating him with his head on one side, turning him slowly to the light. Then he will pat him benevolently upon the shoulder—"Rin awa' tae yer mither, ma wee fella, and let her see if Watty's made a man of you."

Especially upon great occasions, such as the annual school treat or the never-

to-be-forgotten wedding of the laird's daughter or the coronation festivities, Watty's services are so greatly in demand that the bi-weekly sessions have to be continued by lamplight and sometimes even run into the small hours. Thus slowly and surely Watty has established himself in the hearts of the mothers of Crashie Howe. You may overhear them gossiping at their doors about his artistic triumphs.

. . . "He made a rare job o' oor Johnnie; he's awfu' like his feyther when he's new clippit." . . . "Haud on till oor Rob comes hame. I tell ye, ye'll no ken him."

Truly a man justly prized and one whom it would not be easy to replace.

I used to remonstrate with Watty upon his extraordinary generosity in that he refused to make any charge for his ministrations. He would look at me with

a clear and open brow and a kindly eye and shake his head.

"Hoots!" he would say, "it's a pure pleesure to me. I'm terrible fond of it, and a like tae be neebourly. They'll be willing tae dae as much for me one day."

But I have come to know Watty very well during his recent illness (which was like to be his last), and though I may have less admiration than once I had for his generosity of spirit, I recognize a far-reaching astuteness in his character for which I had hardly given him credit. For of all his occupations, that of hair-cutting has been by all odds the most profitable, and I have reason to believe that he embarked upon it for economic reasons and with a far-seeing eye. I have said that he has found his way into the hearts of the mothers of Crashie Howe, and therein lies the strength of his position. As long as Johnnie is going

about with that beautifully ordered head of hair, his father dare refuse Watty no trifling service he may stand in need of, whether it be a day's ploughing, a cart-load of turnips, or a boy to lend a hand with the hay. And as Watty's clients are many, and he is careful to spread his requests as far as possible over the whole of them, the result is the prosperity and success of Watty's farm.

"My pleughing hasna cost me a penny thae ten 'ears back," he confessed to me one night, as he was reviewing the past incidents of a well-spent life. "I need never gang far for ma firing. The blacksmith's aye willing tae pit a bit shoe on the powny, and I've never yet wanted for meat for the coo. I tell ee, there's mony a braw barber in Glesca that couldna say as much."

IX

INDOMITABLE MEG

THE harsh, corrugated countenance of Meg Boreland—so closely akin to the character of her native hills—is perpetually framed in a dull red tartan shawl. During my own acquaintance with her, now extending over some sixteen years, the rest of her head has been consistently invisible, and I could even now only hazard a guess as to the colour of her hair. It is probable that in the seclusion of her own room at night this cherished protection may be laid aside, but never in the public eye. In wintry weather it is reinforced by half a sack thrown on the top of it; on occasions of festival

it is surmounted by a bonnet; in the heats of summer it stands alone; but whatever additions taste or the fancy of the moment may dictate, the dull red tartan shawl keeps its place as the basis and foundation of Mrs Boreland's head-dress. Her other leading characteristic is a gigantesque umbrella, patched in sundry places and not a little uncertain at the joints, but still like to enjoy some years of useful service. This ancient implement cannot be closed without some painstaking effort and not a little risk to the fingers; and it is much too large to take indoors, so that it is generally planted in a convenient bush by the wash-house door, and serves as a striking signal and indication from afar that Mrs Boreland is at work.

Meg has no personal attractions. One would hardly gather her occupation from her appearance, which is far from sug-

gesting a life-long and intimate association with soap and water. Her profession has, one might say, left curiously little imprint upon her personality. There is further, one feels, a lack of insinuating charm about her manner and address. She is strikingly rugged—in face, in figure and in disposition—with horny hands and a piercing eye. Her voice is harsh, and her laughter of a withering shrillness. And yet it is probable that she had attractions in her day, for she had already embarked on the period of her third widowhood when first I saw her. I know nothing of the three husbands of long ago, but she still seems to retain a certain proprietary interest in their names, and I fancy that the first venture—Hepburn was a railway surfaceman—was much less fortunate than the second, which attached her to a ploughman. For while she regards it as little less than an insult

to be addressed as "Mrs Hepburn," she is by no means put out if she is greeted as "Mrs Coupland," but accepts the title most complacently. I understand that the late Mr Boreland drove a grocer's cart, and as he is still remembered in Crashie Howe as a "terrible decent man," I like to believe that the old washerwoman's happiness through the three stages of her married life was progressive. She is naturally rich in relatives and descendants, many of whom are prosperous, so that there is more than one snug fireside awaiting her as soon as she makes up her mind to retire. But there's the rub.

I sometimes wonder if either Mrs Hepburn or Mrs Coupland had any real knowledge of the art of washing. If so, the faculty must, so to speak, have died with them. For old Meg Boreland's long term of office—three days a week—in the laundry of the "Big Hoose" has been

a sorry record of unconscious failure. Everything has been done to open up an avenue to success. Twice has the water supply been overhauled. The firing has been made above reproach. But a few summers ago a huge sycamore tree was sacrificed to appease her, on the sworn assurance that "neither sun nor wund could reach the bleachin' green" while it remained. Not a stone has been left unturned. But the outcome has been consistently disappointing,—collars folded into strange shapes, handkerchiefs of a wilted order, shirts that are old and grey before their time.

It must not be supposed that her employers are solely at the mercy of Meg, for she and Tibbie Proudfoot work together. Tibbie has advanced as the years went on from the position of assistant to that of "colleague and successor" (as the Kirk Session has it).

Indeed, Tibbie is now in complete control of the department. But Meg still holds her ground.

It seems that I am heaping up a heavy charge against old Meg, for I have already stamped her as unprepossessing to the last degree and emphatically incompetent. And to tell the whole truth I must go further, and add that she is as obstinate as any mule. But when all is said there is that about Meg which calls for whole-hearted admiration. I have known few like her, and one feels that it would be hard to find her match in the rising generation. For behind that withered old exterior there beats even now a heart of unflinching courage, a very animating fire of sturdy zeal. She is perfectly indomitable. I have already indicated that she need find no difficulty in making a home among her grandchildren,—but she will have none of it.

People would say that she was "past work"; and she has, I believe, made up her mind never to reach that state alive. Every effort of her unbending will is concentrated upon maintaining her right to her own little one-roomed cottage and to her three days a week in the laundry.

The contest for the laundry has raged for many years, but Meg has triumphed in the end. All the many forces of the "Big Hoose" have been brought to bear on her in vain. The housekeeper has done her best. The factor has more than once put his foot down. On one occasion a rival was actually installed in her position. But all in vain. Meg was dismissed for the first time so long ago as the summer when the new laundry was built. But it was no use dismissing Meg. She got possession of the key from the lodge-keeper, and was there before the

plaster was dry with a bar of soap and a clothes basket. And so "for the meantime" she was allowed to stay. When next the point arose an attempt was made to freeze her out by locking up the clothes (on the theory that bricks cannot be made without straw) and postponing operations till a later date. But she soon got to work, having—it is believed—bribed the housemaid to bring her, under cover of night, enough to be going on with. As time went on her health began to fail, and she was kept in bed by a succession of bad colds and bronchial attacks. More than once it seemed that the conflict had reached an inevitable conclusion.

For at last she was laid low by a long and serious illness, accompanied by a cough—which still survives—of a quite terrifying nature. It was soon recognized that the end had come. The doctor

decreed that, even if she was able to get upon her legs again, Meg must work no more,—for she was seventy-one at this time. One of the Coupland descendants arranged to send up his cart for her belongings, and she herself was to be removed in a closed carriage,—if ever she rose again. Meg lay and listened meekly, gratefully to these plans. Another washerwoman had taken her place.

Three mornings later those who chanced to pass that way saw the old umbrella in the bush.

After that her employers gave up the contest. Meg had conquered. And then came the pensions, and with them the fleeting hope that she would now be content to rest from her labours. Far from it. I think she looks if anything more prosperous, more energetic since the pensions came. And she recently entered upon her eightieth year, striding

up the drive in a shower of sleet, the old umbrella in one hand and the laundry key in another. When at last Meg "slips awa'," as we say in the Border Country, she will, I hope, be found clinging to these two symbols of her office to the last.

X

THOUGHT AND WORD

It is my custom to drop in upon Mrs Cairns at Thrummie Rigg from time to time: she loves to regale me with old tales of the parish and reminiscences of her early youth. When last I called upon her she summed up a long story of the troubles and oppressions of her childhood with the tremendous words—"I was the skodgie of the nursery." "Skodgie" was new to me, and I turned it upon my tongue and tried to define its meaning by calling up a picture of my dignified old friend seventy years ago. I saw her as a pale and harassed little object, the youngest of a boisterous company,

down-trodden and over-driven—constantly straining at the heavy buckets from the well, always washing dishes and peeling potatoes; ordered about and cuffed and kicked into a corner. I suppose that Cinderella, had she been Scotch, would have been the skodgie of the nursery: the whole tragedy of her young life is covered by that word: the whole beauty of its happy issue is in the fact that she did not, owing to the coming of the Prince, grow up to be a skodgie. And I fell to reflecting upon the tongue that we speak in Crashie Howe—how closely our temperament fits it to its needs, and how strangely mingled are the ugliness and beauty of its phrases. For a man who is capable of calling an ear a "lug" or a butcher a "flesher" would hardly be suspected of choice and gentle forms of speech. And yet for my part I think that something is added to life by calling

a pin a "preen," a gate a "yett," and speaking of bairns and whaups and kye in place of children and curlews and cows.

And when a lover asks his lass (in Crashie Howe) if she ever thinks of him when he is far away, she does not reply with a blythe "sometimes"—which means occasionally, casually—but with a winning "whiles"—which means, of course, from time to time, if not quite all the time. And when I demanded of Jim Howat the other day why certain tiles for draining had not turned up, he did not say that he knew I was waiting impatiently for them: he said he knew I "was wearying for them"—which does not mean that I had grown limp and languid with hope deferred, but only that I was tired of waiting.

It is curious that with the powers that we possess in this plastic tongue of saying exactly what we mean we should often

be at such pains to make our conversation vague and full of saving clauses. We always break the shock of an unusual word. We should not like to state that we knew of some one who had shot an elk. We would relate that he had shot "what they ca' an elk," or that he had shot "an elk, as the sayin' is." We have a national and hereditary fear of committing ourselves. When we have an appointment to keep we do not say as we look at our watch that it is time we were gone, but (actually!) it is time we weren't here. And when we ask for information, we avoid a direct query from which there is no escape: we do not ask how old you are, or where you are going, or what is your name—but how old you will be, or where you will be going, or what will be your name, I wonder? If you stop James Sloan on the way home from the market and ask him what price

he got for his lambs, he will tell you that he cannot rightly mind and that he's afraid he couldna say—and it wouldna be twenty-six shillings, was it? And maybe it was twenty-five and nine. Yes, it would be that. Yet the price of his lambs is, of course, the event of his year: it is graven on his heart and will be remembered to his dying day. He wanted to save you from the shock of having it blurted out at you—that was all.

Yet we have fine concentrated phrases, so apt and simple that it is hard to see how other users of our language can afford to be without them. You have had a dispute with a servant—it is enough to say that you "had words" with him. You dismissed him and he was insolent and overbearing—it is enough to say "he took it high." Or you are elated at an unexpected success—it is enough to say you are "big about it." While

we have a word for bringing in, carrying, carting, or leading the corn which is as brief and concentrated as a bullet. We speak of "inning" corn.

My own knowledge of our Lowland tongue is most imperfect, but there are compensations in that, for I never know when I may meet with a new word that gives me pleasure; and I am indebted to Mrs Cairns for many besides skodgie. She told me once that she had had the two box bushes by the yett trimmed to the same size because she did like the wee place to be eye-sweet. And she bought from me two bullock stirks not long ago to winter in the glebe, which she rents from the minister, because her son Andrew had told her that the grass was too long and coarse for sheep. I agreed that the beasts would clean it up. "Weel," said she, "they can aye rugg away at it." And I had a vision

of strong jaws tearing at half-withered tufts with a sidelong shake of the head and the flash of a bloodshot eye, rending them sideways—rugging, indubitably rugging.

But you may live in Crashie Howe for years and have no true idea of the range and colour of our tongue if you have never been among us on the ice. When we are curling we rise above our normal stature and our reserve is flung away. And there is no more eloquent skip among us than the farmer of Polnackie. When Alec Quigley takes his stand at the tee-head his battle-cry resounds along the valley from the Bridge to Drumshaws Bend. And if you draw near you will not, I think, remain unmoved at the fine flow of his exhortation and advice. I can see him now, one knee on the ice and his broom held upright in his hand. His face is lined with deep anxiety, his

voice has fallen to a broken whisper. "For the love o' the game, Davie," he says, "gie me a shaughlin' guaird." There are some who would translate that queer word "shuffling," but only a curler really knows what it means—and he can never tell. And when the guard has started fairly up the ice and falls away into a useless side-track, there is a whole world of tragedy in his heart-felt cry—"Eh, man! Ye're awa' doon cuddy lane!" Figures and metaphors abound in Alec's swift discourse. He will tell his man to crack a sparrow's egg (on the face of the winner), but not, of course, to break it—delicate work for a ponderous stone that has travelled forty yards; or, in another telling phrase, he will ask him to die at the face of a lying stone. He will try to wheedle a shot out of his player by coaxing him with soft words, inviting him to "creep into the

bosom" of the tee-head or to "cuddle into granny's wing." When the way is closed in front you will hear his ringing call to "make a road"; and when the port is narrow and the ice is very keen, and the shot demands the height of sweet precision, he will ask you to "come *dreaming* to the tee."

But when the shot is played and the head is won, you will hear him half a mile away acclaim his henchman with a roar of triumph: "Man, man, it's the very thing the doctor ordered!"

XI

THE FIRST ICE

We are all curlers in Crashie Howe. As soon as we leave the school our first care in life is to possess ourselves of a pair of stones and begin earnestly to prepare for the day when we shall play as lead in one of our eight rinks. We are all curlers, with the exception of Tom Dowie, who has a wooden leg, and now, after two serious accidents upon the ice, has at last resigned his rink and set up as a biting critic of the play of other men. But Tom is always the first to turn out in the morning and the last to leave; and we have lately appointed him secretary: he enjoys peculiar

advantages in the testing of the strength of the ice, as there is no harm done if his wooden leg goes through. We are all curlers, and, however pressing our affairs may be, we are all ready to play truant on the ice. No work is done in Crashie Howe when Peter's Moss is bearing.

Peter's Moss lies just south of the Ford on the right side of the stream. It is no more than a marsh in summer, but in winter it fills up to a sufficient depth, for it was dammed and levelled by our forefathers, who met together in the school-house in the year 1834—as recorded in the old minute-book of the club—"to form themselves into a society to be denominated the Crashie Howe Curling Club." The "laws of the club" were drawn up on that occasion, and they stand almost unaltered to this day, though we have fallen short of that high sense of duty which ordained that "each

member who absents himself from a meeting without plausible reason shall be fined sixpence," and that the members of the committee if they fail to hold the annual meeting on the appointed day "shall subject themselves to a penalty of a shilling each."

We do well to take our opportunity when it comes. Curling in our climate is an affair of disappointments and broken hopes. We never know when it may come or how soon it will go; for in the very height of the opening conflict the cold clammy hand of the thaw may fall upon us. There is no room for delay, and with the first ice of the season Peter's Moss draws the whole population to its banks. . . .

The rain has cleared off early in the afternoon and the wind has shifted to the north. The clouds are breaking up, and as I come home across the fields

towards nightfall there is a certain crispness, a slight stiffening of the sodden ground. It is worth while to take a look at the thermometer before I go in to tea. The sun sets red and the wind falls, and the stars come out with a steely twinkle in the clear sky. I am awakened in the morning by the sound of carts on the clean hard road outside, no longer muffled by the mud, but ringing clear on the frosty air; and then I hear the gladdening noise of the boy in the farmyard below, breaking the ice on the cattle-trough. I must have another look at the thermometer before breakfast.

On the third morning, if all goes well, I am on the Moss before the sun is up—summoned by the screech of the "ringer"—at work marking off the rinks. The eager figure of Tom Dowie emerges from the breathless twilight to greet me with the anxious query that will be put

and answered a hundred times in the course of the day—"D'ye think it'll hold?" Of course I think it will hold, for the curler's faith in a lasting frost is a pathetic triumph of hope over experience. Indeed, Tom Dowie is already talking of fixing the Medal for Saturday; he has the telegrams in his pocket that will summon eight rinks from Glencarrick for the annual spiel to-morrow. And we are heartened to hear each detail of his plans, though it is more than likely that long ere they mature the surface of Peter's Moss will be given back to ducks and waterhens: it is even said that Crawford has predicted rain to-night.

As I return to breakfast I meet James Aitken's ploughman with a wheelbarrow full of stones. He asks me if I think it is going to hold. A cart full of stones from Scroggs passes the door as I go in. And shortly after a small boy appears,

bubbling with excitement, to inquire if my rink is made up, as his father would be willing to play if I am a man short. I am able to contradict a rumour that the minister is away from home, for I had sent him a telegram yesterday that I knew would fetch him back. By this time there is great activity on the ice, and on the distant sky-line I can see Rob Hunter, the Fingland shepherd, who must have left home before dawn in faith that his services would be needed by his skip. A distracted figure passes up the lane, going back to the village with a broken handle, desperately turning over in his head the most likely places to borrow one. More messengers come in—one in search of a spare besom, another speiring if I would put up Mr Halliday's horse, another seeking a hoe to scrape the ice. . . . And I must put handles in my own stones and bring out

my broom from the eight-day clock and knock the dust off it. And I must cram some bread and cheese into my pocket, and, of course, an apple. And perhaps the dairymaid catches me on the door-step with some question (that belongs to a far-off world) about the feeding of a calf . . . . And here comes the laird's motor. . . . Yes, yes, as far as he can judge, it is sure to hold.

I count it no little privilege to own the farm that faces Peter's Moss.

From eleven o'clock to three the battle rages—grand hours of oblivion, with every faculty absorbed in the rigour of the game. We have no thought to spare for the transformation that has been wrought in the valley since the sodden days of a week ago, when we were scattered far and wide, each of us plodding dourly about his business, spending whole days without contact with his neighbour. For

here we are assembled in close brotherhood, filled with a common zeal, united in a single effort, harassed by a single anxiety—as we watch the sky for a shift of wind or a sinister drift of cloud—Is it going to hold ?

And old Tom Dowie, from his position on the bank, has a great picture before him—a picture without parallel in the whole realm of sport. The deep roar of running stones fills the ear, mingled with yells of triumph or groans of disappointment. The running onslaught of nimble sweepers moves back and forth ; earnest skips are conning the tee-head or shouting their directions in bursts of fiery eloquence ; the minister—to the wonder and delight of his own children, watching awestruck from the side—is wildly gesticulating with a feverish broom or executing a dance of triumph to celebrate a hard-won shot. The laird

thunders down a warning in the broadest Scotch. And old Archie Marchbank, my own back-hand, a man at other times both silent and morose, is prancing down the centre of the rink, the light of inspiration in his face, reiterating a piercing yell of "Haud aff her, James! Haud aff her! For the verra love o' the game, haud aff her!" . . . And so the match is over, won, as every curling match should be, by the last stone of the day's play. And the telegrams have gone: Glencarrick will be here to-morrow. No one likes to point out that it has been clouding up as the afternoon wore on and the wind is down and the ice is not so keen as it was. Of course it's going to hold!

But as I turn in at my door I am startled by a drop of rain upon my cheek, and hope dies within me.

XII

MY OLD "BACK-HAND"

The rink medal, which has hung above the chimney-piece so long that I had come to regard it as part of the furniture of the room, in common with the clock, is there no longer. It has left a little circle of bright wall-paper that has not faded like the rest, to mark the place it used to occupy, and I like to believe that this sign will not have altogether disappeared before I bring it back again. For many years it made an annual journey to the Moss, only to be handed to the secretary, and, when at the close of play the scores were made up, to be gracefully restored to me with a few well-

chosen words. But it made one journey too many last week, and I returned empty-handed. I dropped in at the smithy the following day, and there saw it hanging above the forge, looking, I thought, curiously out of place. But the blacksmith is a good sportsman and a keen curler, and I do not complain.

And so I find that my rink is no longer a terror to the country-side. I thought that I had pieced it together with no little skill, and my players had worked with a will, and seldom disappointed me. My new lead, above all, had been a conspicuous success. Yet there was something wrong. The old zest and backbone were gone out of us. We seemed to be always a neck behind, to be always striking instead of guarding. And the blacksmith has the medal.

Possibly I find myself in a measure to blame. I cannot feel yet quite the

old keenness and enthusiasm. The ice was perfect, and we have never had a better muster of good curlers. But the one curler was not there.

The thought of old Archie had been running in my head all day. Only that morning I had passed his mean little cottage by the side of the road, and had been attracted by a knot of women and children gathered about the door, for the most part of the male population were at the ice. I looked in and found an auctioneer at work, carelessly offering for sale the few odds and ends of any value that the old man had left behind him, his bed and chest of drawers, and the stirk that he had summered in his little field. I had the good fortune to arrive in time to buy his curling-stones. No one has a better right than I to keep them in his memory. For one autumn night Archie had died as he had lived—

alone, uncared for. He had been at work the day before, silent and uncomplaining to the last.

This was a hard, dour, unfriendly man, with a bitter tongue and a repellent manner—one who sternly went his way and kept his neighbours in ignorance of his affairs. There are some who still believe that he was a miser and fabulously wealthy, and some who hold that he was daily face to face with poverty. Had it not been for the one grand passion of his life he might have lived and died an unconsidered outcast. But he was a curler, and his love of curling seemed to supply some vital spark that made him human. For the rest of the year what kindly and expansive qualities he had were deep sunk within himself, but when the ice came there was something almost sublime in his transformation. With the whole force of his stubborn soul, and

a skill born of a lifetime's experience, he fought my battles for me as third player, or "back-hand," and for those brief frosty days, before his enthusiasm went out with the coming of the thaw, he was a king among his fellows. I can see him now, nursing the sole of his stone before he sets it down, rubbing it tenderly with the palm of his hand to remove the slightest speck of dirt, and then slowly taking his stand and finding his balance with his weight on his right foot. At last he looks up for his directions with an expression of tense anxiety and painful eagerness, and then he sets down his stone. A moment later, when the shot has been made with a perfect precision, I find him standing beside me with a smile of quiet assurance on his face.

"I tellt ye that wad find her," he remarks.

It was the strangest thing in the world to see in the battered old dyker fine qualities of kindliness and sympathy and a quiet mastership, which seemed to emerge for a few hours, only to suffer a long eclipse once more.

My rink played manfully, but the blacksmith has the medal, and I for one do not grudge it him.

XIII

WEATHER-WISE

CRAWFORD is not his real name. So great is his reputation as a weather prophet —for, unlike other prophets, he is held in high esteem in his own country—that were I to disclose his name I should never hear the end of it. Crawford travels the country in a carrier's cart, and his wisdom is beyond dispute. The anxious farmer hangs upon his words, and no one would dare to project a picnic or a school treat without consulting him. It is a common saying—attributed, I believe, to himself in the first instance—that when the poems of Burns and the novels of Scott are for-

gotten the prophecies of Crawford will live in the hearts of the people.

I cannot believe that Crawford's reputation is based entirely on a record of unerring success, and he admits a certain indebtedness to his ancestors. For the Crawfords have been weather prophets for generations, and their sagacity is accepted as a hereditary instinct. Above all, he is wise in this—under no circumstances will he give a reason for his conclusions. Crawford has said it. It is enough. It must not be supposed that our carrier descends to the level of a newspaper or meteorological office and gives daily forecasts. He does not bind himself to speak at any fixed time, and the inquirer on many occasions must go empty away. Like other and more distinguished persons in the hands of the interviewer, he "has nothing to say." It is only when, at odd in-

tervals, the spirit descends upon him that he will undertake to prognosticate. It is probable that he likes to rest upon his laurels after a conspicuous success and to take an early opportunity of redeeming a failure. But when he does speak his words are carried far and wide through three counties, and one may hear in many a village shop or railway station the verdict passed from mouth to mouth. No discussion of the deplorable state of the weather—and there are many such discussions in our part of Scotland—is complete without an announcement of Crawford's latest dictum.

The wind is in the north-east, and keen night frosts far into April are checking growth. Pastures are bare, and lambs are multiplying; but let us take heart, for "Crawford says it's to be twenty-four hours o' rain the end o' the week." I think I have never

heard anyone scoff at the information. I am sure I have never heard anyone ask, "Who is Crawford?"

Is he generally right or wrong? It is very difficult to say. So many unauthorized or garbled statements are circulated in his name, that when anyone accuses him of a palpable failure the true believer will tell you that such-and-such a forecast was clearly unofficial; for I am convinced that while successes are gratefully added to the list of his triumphs, his failures soon pass into oblivion. There seems to be a general feeling that it was not Crawford but the weather that was wrong.

Quite outside of the prime question of accuracy, there is one weak spot about Crawford, to my mind — his profound pessimism. There are times when he is compelled to predict fine weather, when

one must suppose the spirit descends upon him in such force that he must speak. But that is rare. The hopeful view is always dragged out of him against his will. He contemplates reluctantly the prospect of a fine day. On the other hand he is said to have an unerring instinct for a coming snowstorm, and revels in the prognostication of a gale. I used to believe that a general consideration of the climate of his district had led him to the conclusion that it was safer to predict bad weather than good, but I think I must acquit him of that feeble form of cunning. He has a natural tenderness for rain and storm—that is all. He is on safer ground in dealing with them than in foretelling sunshine.

Crawford has a profound respect for his own talents. His deportment indicates in divers ways how fine a thing

it is to live, as he does, on intimate terms with the elements, and to see, beyond a passing change of wind or rise in the barometer, into the secrets of the week that is to come. For he scorns to contemplate the morrow, and in his greater moments performs prodigious leaps into the future. I think he owes much to the lofty, offhand manner with which he flings his message forth. He never seems to know which way the wind is blowing at the moment. He is not interested in the barometer. He does not care to hear what the weather has been in England or on the continent of Europe. The behaviour of birds and beasts—so great a stand-by of lesser prophets—is below his notice. You may point out to him, if you will, a vast accumulation of evidence in favour of continued frost. He will listen patiently, but it is naught to him. Quietly he

will sum up, "A spate on the 22nd." You may take it or leave it. He is fond of telling you of the offers he has received from newspapers anxious to publish his opinion, and of estimating the certain profits that would accrue to him by editing an almanac. But he leaves you to conclude that he is well content with his present proud position, and that he prefers from his carrier's cart to prepare the minds of the population for coming disaster or relieve their anxieties with promises of impending change.

Crawford has been an institution, and many besides himself are proud of his successes and anxiously await the fulfilment of his words. But I think that of all his admirers no one is more closely interested in his success than Mrs Crawford, his spouse and helpmeet. For it is currently reported—far be it from me

to estimate with what measure of truth —that when he fails, when the looked-for rain refuses to fall or the expected gale declines to blow, Crawford goes home and beats his wife.

XIV

FAMINE ON THE UPLANDS

It was in a rare glint of sunshine between the driving snow showers of an unspeakable March that my trap was arrested at Waterfoot by a flock of sheep. It is no very uncommon occurrence, but as I drew up to let them pass, and found myself surrounded by an undulating sea of rough grey fleeces—looking mean and grimy against the background of snow—I was struck at once by something strange in the appearance of the flock. It was clear that these sheep were not destined for the market, nor were they being merely transferred from one hill farm to another. It was, I think, their

numbers which first arrested my attention. They came pouring round the bend of the road unceasingly, filling the little street of the village, overflowing into the gardens upon one side, and surging up the bank on the other; and when at last the stream came to an end and the shepherd and his dog passed me, when I had advanced a few steps into a full view up the valley, I found that those I had already encountered were but an advance guard. A second cohort followed, not a hundred yards behind, and beyond them again a third and a fourth. And then my memory went back many years to the early months of 1895, and I understood. I was in the presence of a phenomenon that had not occurred since that terrible winter. It was a migration on a grand scale—the trek of an entire population.

The inhabitants of the village were all

at their doors by the time I had dismounted from my trap, watching the slow-moving procession with sympathetic eyes, and exchanging comments and reminiscences. And indeed there was something tragic, pitiable about the appearance of these sheep. They were like an army in retreat. For the little black-faced sheep when he is at home among the heather is a bold, optimistic soul, roaming over a vast tract of country and grazing in inaccessible places. But these moved wearily on the muddy road, those on the outskirts stopping every few yards to nibble at a tuft of grass wherever it showed through the snow, and those in the centre pattering quietly along, but always with a tendency to push onwards, away from the crowd. The shepherd followed, with his dog held close in check, gently urging them on, patiently gathering in the stragglers from

one side of the road after the other. But when the flock reached the centre of the village one would say that they awoke suddenly to their position : panic took possession of them. With upraised heads and startled eyes those on the outside backed close to the mass, till they formed a compact bunch in the centre of the road, huddled together in a common terror, and refusing to move forward. It was a new world of weird alarms to them—born and bred for the most part a thousand feet above the sea ; for I suppose the oldest among them had never in her life left her native hills, since she followed her mother's footsteps at the first, learning every rock and ledge and gulley, and how to find her way to every spot where grass or heather grows.

The frightened crowd breaks into a trot down the road. When they reach

the open gate in the dyke that divides the village from the moor one or two of the foremost of them, according to their strange habit, even go through the formality of jumping an imaginary barrier. But very soon they grow tired again and listless, for the weight of three hungry weeks has told upon them. So they trudge doggedly out of sight. What is their destination? some one asks the shepherd. He names a farm far down the valley of the Dreep, where grass parks have been taken for them. And so the second and third divisions go by, and still they come, hungry and bewildered, fill the village street for a moment, fill the air with the pattering of a thousand tiny feet, and pass on upon the second stage of their long journey. And with the rear-guard comes Scroggs himself, in his old-fashioned gig, directing operations. He pulls up at the

smiddy and descends into an admiring circle.

"Weel," he says, "we're fairly beat at last!"

"It'll be lying deep on the north side," the blacksmith remarks.

"It's deep on every side," is the reply. "You wouldna believe what it's been these three weeks back. It's clean ridiculous in the month o' March." And he goes on to tell a fearful tale of the north-east wind that swept the snow into the gulleys and piled it high about the dykes; of how day after day he awoke to the same outlook of driving flakes, and little by little the whole face of the country was smothered in snow; of how shepherds in outlying places had with difficulty dug a track from the cottage door and had faced the storm with a sinking heart, fearful lest part of the flock should be lost altogether, only to

be found when the thaw came and it was too late.

The sheep were driven back step by step. It is rough and uneven on the hills, and as long as the tops of the old heather or bents show through the snow the black-faced sheep will pick a living somehow; but soon the higher places had to be deserted, and day by day the circle was drawn closer, till at last the famine-stricken throng was gathered into the sheltered hollow by the farmhouse. The store of rough hay which had been accumulating for some years back was soon exhausted, all the sooner in that the greater part of the flock had no knowledge of the meaning of hay and trampled it under-foot; and still the north-east wind was howling and the snow drifted in dense clouds across the open spaces. Scroggs had waited on, hoping against hope, knowing that at

any moment a few hours of rain and warmth would set free the storm-bound food supplies. But he was "fairly beat at last."

He remounts his trap, nodding farewell to his sympathetic hearers. "Weel," he remarks as he drives off, "the puir beasts'll find a full bite at their journey's end, if once we can get them that length."

XV

THE SPATE

I HAVE been wondering just what there is about a flood that it should gladden and uplift the heart of man. I sit at the window where the vast blurred billows of rain are rolling up out of the south-west, and I look up from time to time to see if the little impromptu lake in the corner of the field beside the gate is encroaching any further on the stubble land beyond. An "anxious little burn," as we say, unknown to the map, and which came into being only yesterday afternoon, is creating a formidable pool in the garden also, and the neck of land between the two is growing narrower all

the time. The great moment will come when they unite. That is what I am looking forward to, and that is why I have moved to the window.

The floods are out. Regardless of the direction of the wind or the state of the barometer, the rain has beaten upon us for ten days or more, with hardly a respite. It seemed for a time that it had spent itself to-day. It rained still, but in a tired, uninterested way, as a child will continue to sob at intervals after the hurt is forgotten, from force of habit only. But about midday the mist came down again, and the deluge returned with all its former power. I can hear the roar of the river now, and to-morrow some chapters will be added to the tale of disaster. We shall learn of crops washed away, of sheep drowned and trains delayed, of damage to property and disorganization of traffic. And it is

all very sad. And yet—it is not to be denied—one has a sneaking admiration for the flood. I believe I should have experienced a certain unworthy disappointment if the day had ended in sunshine and my two new lakes—there cannot be more than six feet between them now—had drained away. I wonder why.

I think there must be within us some strange sporting instinct, some cheerful remnant of the sentiments of our childhood, that is ready to welcome abnormal or strenuous weather conditions. One remembers a curious incantation or charm which was employed in the days of one's youth when falling snow showed signs of clearing off. I do not believe in that charm now; but I have still some of the old feeling left—that it is a pity it should stop snowing. It is one of the distressing facts of life that the ordinary run of grown-up persons, especially those

who live in towns, do want the snow to stop. They know very well that it is a nuisance, and they have forgotten that it is a wonder and a joy. But when it is a question of floods, so long as they do not submerge our own back kitchen, traces of the old feeling remain—a feeling that something has been added to life, something jolly and exhilarating. It is partly, perhaps, that we are all at heart lovers of records: to know that we are experiencing the lowest temperature, the strongest wind, or the heaviest spate for a generation, stirs our blood almost in spite of ourselves. I had myself a noble thrill of pride to-day when I learnt from my rain-gauge that nine inches of rain had fallen in eighteen days. It wants but another four to make a record total for the month.

But the flood owes much of its fascination also to its unexpected and picturesque

results. It alters in a moment the face of the landscape. One has seen that field or that road a hundred times, but never quite like this. One has seen many rivers, but never before a river that flows out of the corner of a farmyard. One has seen many lakes, but none with quite the comic charm of this one, in which the trees stand knee-deep and the hedge is but a line upon the surface. And, if only the position be grave enough, things in general are so gloriously mixed up and diverted from their proper uses. A floating beehive passes under the bridge, the top of the wall becomes a causeway, or, if you care to adventure, the trough becomes a punt. One finds out which of the carts will float and which will not. One might never have gleaned that knowledge had it not been for the flood. It makes an end of all monotony in one's surroundings. It in-

troduces a breezy spirit of adventure into the occupations of every day. One positively regrets that it must pass so soon. If there were a sudden frost now, to fix the country in this new form for weeks to come! That *would* be fun!

The isthmus between my two new lakes is growing spongy now, and its green is toning down into a leaden, watery hue. A tiny rivulet has already found its way from the higher level to the lower, and as I look a pair of great white ducks begin to take possession, rejoicing in the virgin excellence of the dabblings. It is good to watch them and to try to enter into their feelings. I have no little sympathy with ducks, for I have always been a lover of rain—of the white, slanting rain that washes, the pinging, easterly rain that strikes, and the sweet-scented, vaporous rain that fills the world with the smell of green and growing things.

It has been a week of high festival for ducks.

But it is not entirely the eccentricities of the flood or its power of playing pranks and breaking bounds that makes it stand out as an epoch in the history of the year, nor yet does one remember it only by the records it sets up. It is full of interest throughout the area of its wide diffusion, but it is tremendous and majestic in its concentrated channels. Standing on the little bridge at the foot of the glen, beneath the high arch of autumn-tinted beeches and in the deafening roar of many waters, one has witnessed a succession of glorious and overpowering scenes. To enter into the full spectacle of the spate you must be there when Crashie Water begins to rise. For the effect is in its very essence a crescendo, and half the force of it is lost if you see it only at the climax. You must be

there to watch the deep eddying channel through the rocks, stirred suddenly with a new life, sharply discoloured by the smurred and muddy water from a dozen mountain streams far above. Then for a breathless hour the pace, the volume, and the din are growing every moment; the clear clean water is suffused with a rich tawny stain of earth and sand, rock after rock goes under, and all the summer vegetation of the banks bends, swept before the torrent that tugs ceaselessly at the clinging roots. And now the lower branches of the trees are caught, swaying and wrenching in the flood. Deep in the river-bed gravel is shifting, rumbling, rolling on, and all the scattered drift of twigs and branches, cones and fallen leaves, is hurled forward in confusion. There is a wild delirium in these living waters, a tingling sense of intoxication in the slavering foam and far-tossed

spray. And when the rain is over, and the first great rush of the spate has passed, you will find on the morrow, if the sun shines in the glen, a scene of exquisite beauty. For now the stream is dark and clear, with pure white bubbles straying on the surface. Its waters are a sombre wine colour beneath the bridge, but in the open, where the sun strikes them, they are a wondrous blend of golden amber and reflected blue, a colour beyond words.

The isthmus between my lakes has disappeared. The ducks are swimming bravely in the twilight on the unbroken stretch of water. I may draw the curtain now on yet another record to the credit of the spate.

XVI

A TRAFFIC EXPERT

As you turn into the high-road below Waterfoot you are at once arrested by the figure of Peter M'Crae, standing upon his heap of stones by the wayside, hammer in hand, not unlike a caricature of the god Vulcan. Peter is no ordinary stone-breaker. Very early in your acquaintance he will be at pains to explain to you that stone-breaking is his hobby, not necessarily his profession, that he has "plenty o' siller, but canna abide an idle life." And certainly he seems to live up to it. He revels in stone-breaking, and counts it one of the few professions still open to a man of parts. But it

is not so much the actual practice of his trade that attracts him as the conditions under which it is carried on.

"Ye're aye by the roadside," he explains, "and in touch wi' the traffic. Whiles ye hae a bit crack wi' a cyclist maybe, and whiles a stranger comes along, and ye ken where a' the folk are gaun, and there's motors thae last few 'ears; and maybe a traction engine. Ooh! It's a grand life. Ye see the best o' everything."

It is a fine thing after a talk with Peter to look back at the bend of the road, and see him set his stone, grip his hammer, and deliver the ponderous onset. So long as the road is deserted he will work on with a perfect swing and rhythm, while the dust flies far about him, and the broken stones heap high to right and left. But as soon as a wayfarer comes in sight, whether in

carriage or cart, bicycling or walking, even if it be a child returning from the school, or a lost dog, Peter suspends operations and brings all his powers of observation into play. For every passer-by carries with him the possibility of a "crack," and, even if he fails to respond to Peter's friendly greeting, leaves behind him a wide field of surmise as to his business and destination.

There is only one thing that can tempt Peter away from his post—for even on Sundays it is said that he sits upon his heap of stones for hours together lest he should miss some important item of his beloved traffic. With a sudden rise in the river and the prospect of a "worm water" Peter lays by his hammer. The chief of his fishing experiences, which he once related to me with great dramatic power, was on an occasion when he entered into a competition with a curate

—or, as he said, "a minister body"—who was staying in the neighbourhood.

"He was on the one side o' the water and I was on the other. It was a maist extraordinar' thing. Furst I huikit a broon troot, and then he huikit a broon troot. Efter a few minutes I huikit a herling, and he huikit a herling. And next I huikit a sea-troot, and"—with tremendous emphasis—"he huikit a sea-troot." At this point there was a long pause. "I couldna get the better o' him," he concluded. "The haill day we just huikit beast aboot!"

Peter has many fishing stories to relate, but stone-breaking is, after all, his main subject of conversation. He is always eager to recall reminiscences culled from years of devotion to the road.

"I hae seen this day the furst twa-horse caravan that ever came to the valley," he will begin impressively. "In

the month o' June in the year 1904 there was a pleesure-tourin' van went by: and mony a time there's been a bit gipsy waggon, but *no' like yon.* And we had five motors on the one day last week. There's been a surprisin' growth o' traffic on the road thae last ten 'ears. It's a fair toun. If ye'll believe me," with great earnestness, "the traffic's getting that thick these days that I seldom get an hour to mysel' withoot some interruption."

Peter's great wealth, I should add, is a mere fable of his own invention, and he must break stones for a living like any other man.

XVII

THE LAST LOAD

When she happens to be quartered in the field by the highroad Auld Blackie is the unwitting butt of much sarcastic comment. Flippant young cyclists from the city are pleased to make merry at the cost of her ancient figure, which sags perilously in the middle. More thoughtful pedestrians will pause at the gate and look about the field for her, always surprised to find her still there, wondering on what grounds she is able to justify her continued existence and lay claim to her keep. Above all, farmers—from a distance—will sagely shake their heads, pronouncing judgment upon that lack

of thrift which can tolerate so great an appetite in one no longer useful who could not plead that she was ornamental. And yet James Sloan of Dreepside is not unthrifty.

I have said that these are farmers from a distance, for those of the immediate neighbourhood know the story. I will not deny that the old mare, now reported to be well advanced in her fourth decade, is one of the most disreputable and ungainly objects ever seen in Crashie Howe. Her coat has suffered so much of late that she wears the semblance of one dressed in rags. Her hair is always in her eyes. She is as shapeless as an old boot. Despite a large consumption of nourishing food her ribs may be freely counted from a distance, while her hooves are so badly broken down that the footprints that she leaves behind her in the mud might well suggest the passing of

some prehistoric beast. I am not at all sure that it will not be a relief to her owner when the time at last arrives when her infirmities have so far gained upon her that life has become a burden and she may be disposed of with an easy conscience. But that day would seem to be far distant, she is so well-contented with her lot. It is a fearsome thing to see her roll, luxuriously groaning, legs in air, in the morning sunshine; and she will tuck herself up for the night at the back of the dyke at peace with all the world. Her toothless old gums are still capable of mumbling lumps of sugar when the children chance to pass that way; and though she is losing her coat with such rapidity that a state of total nudity appears imminent, she does not seem to suffer from the cold.

She has entered with keen enjoyment upon the licensed retirement that was

conferred upon her on a dreary February afternoon two years ago. Before that day arrived it had become a leading question with the rising generation at the farm—who were all for efficiency—how she came to be there at all. She had retired from the plough, and with the exception of a few odd jobs about the steading—carting stobs or sheep-troughs from one field to another or bringing in a standard implement when the other horses were at work—she seldom needed to bestir herself, for the farmer's son flatly refused to be seen on the road with her. Indeed, when the call to action came she was sleepily pottering about in the yard in her stocking soles, as the children used to say—she was not even shod.

The truth is that she had one advocate and supporter on the spot who would not listen to a word against her. Old

Jake, the ploughman, alone had known her in her first youth; he was never tired of telling tales of her prowess, of her indomitable pluck, of the prodigious journeys she had made "at the flitting," of the loads she had "lifted" when all others had failed, of the sledge-hammer force of that first tremendous pull, when she knew the odds were against her and she must set her teeth and put her back into it. For she would break her heart before she failed. And James philosophically supposed that everyone had a "weak bit aboot him somewhere," and Jake's weak bit was the mare. And Jake stoutly maintained that the mare was not done yet. He knew that sort, he said. To the end of their days their pride and temper would not allow them to be beat. And so the amiable enthusiasm of the old man met with a kindly indulgence—and no one dreamt

that he would ever have occasion to make good his words.

James Sloan had given up his other farm in Annandale and was moving all his furniture and possessions to Dreepside. A week of rain and wind following upon snow had reduced the lane that leads into the yard to a horrid state of poached and liquid quagmire. And thus it was that the contractor's great van, with its load of furniture and two powerful horses, came to rest just short of the gateway, and a lively ten minutes ensued of pushing, hauling, levering, of cracking whips and shouts of exhortation. But it was all in vain : the farmer was appealed to.

"There isna a horse aboot the bit the day," said he. "The son's awa' wi' them baith for a load o' slag frae Dalwoodie."

Old Jake was watching with a quiet eye and with an inward deep contempt

for horses that having pulled and failed would not whole-heartedly try a second time.

"I wad soon shift her for ye wi' the auld mare," he remarked. And James did not wish to distress the old man needlessly. After all, it would do no harm, and the ploughman might perhaps come to see his folly. . . . The contractor's men had no such delicacy, and entered fully into the joke when Blackie was led forth clad for action.

"There'll jist be one customer for that yin when ye come tae sell her, Jake," said one. "And that's the rag-and-bone man."

But Jake was quietly setting to work with a look of hard concentration on his face. It was perhaps the most tremendous moment of his life. It was no time for trifling. "I've never seen her beat at a straught-pull," he remarked.

"Keep a guid look oot for the pollisman," the other man suggested cheerily. "They're gettin' terrible strict aboot the ill-treatment o' horse these days."

"Whisht," said the ploughman curtly.

Quite a little knot of spectators had gathered by this time, for these operations were going forward within full view of the highroad, and Jake found some silent support in Wattie Hepburn, the dyker, who had known Blackie in her prime. But to the rest the entertainment was in the nature of a farce.

"Will ye pit the chains on her?"

"Na, na; tak' oot that helpless beast o' yours. I'll pit her in the shafts." The other horses were removed and held in readiness to be traced in front of indomitable Blackie. Jake yoked her solemnly and scrutinized the harness, changing the hole of a strap here and there. "She finds oot the weak spots

when she begins to pull in airnest," he explained, "but I think there's no fears o' a break."

The crowd could with difficulty keep their gravity at the spectacle of the sleepy uncouth old mare with the vast van at her back. But the dramatic moment came when the contractor's men brought up their horses and began to hitch the chains. "Stand back!" shouted Jake. "She never could abide onything in the front of her: and she disna need twa useless beasts tae block her road."

"What in the warld div 'ee mean, Jake?"

"She'll shift it hersel', I'm tellin' ye."

"Do ye ken the weight o' it? Man, it's fower and a hauf tons."

"Stand back! She wad shift a growin' tree if she was askit!"

There was an awful pause. Jake, with

the gleam of battle in his eye, picked up the ropes and shook them gently on the mare's back.

"Noo then, wumman! Hup!"

The mare seemed in a moment to be possessed of a demon. Something awoke within her that had lain dormant for a span of years. Once she tossed her head in a frenzy of flying mane and bloodshot eye, once she snorted—then hurled herself like a cannon-ball along the lane. Mud, water, stones flew right and left, and the great van swung through the gate, across the yard and up the drive to the front door beyond. By the time we arrived breathless in its wake, Jake was collectedly unhitching the traces: and as the shouting subsided a fervid voice was heard to say—

"Fower and a hauf tons!"

"I tellt ye she wad shift it. Maybe I can tak her oot now. Yer ain beasts'll

manage on the way hame. The van'll be empty then."

Jake said no more, but the farmer was so carried away as to register that rash vow that he may yet have cause to repent.

"Jake, lad," said he with some emotion, "she'll be keepit like a lady the rest o' her days."

And James Sloan is a terrible honest man and would never break his word to man or beast.

XVIII

A MISUNDERSTANDING

I SUPPOSE that old David Macmorran's death at the age of ninety-four could scarce be called untimely. But it is certain that it appeared so to the family at Drumshaws, so deeply rooted was the conviction that he would live to be a hundred. It was only five years since he had retired from active service, under pressure, and to the last he was always ready to turn out to lend a hand at the hay or give the benefit of his counsel in the case of a lame horse. Nearly every day for over seventy years he had been in and out of the farmyard. With advancing age and increasing wisdom he

had gone beyond his strict routine as ploughman and added one duty after another to his responsibilities, till at the last he ruled the destinies of the farm, and its rightful owner had dropped into the position of a constitutional monarch, acquiescing in the government of his minister. His granddaughter took it kindly that so many members of the family—one even from distant Manchester —were present at the funeral. And on that evening the story was divulged of the one crisis in his long career that had disturbed the relationship of master and man.

Willie Sproat, the farmer, had been a young man then, and Davie was in the prime of life, a quiet, canny man, infinitely diligent, slow of movement, on terms of closest intimacy with his horses and with none beside. And his master was of like temperament, not easily put

about, a man of few words but of determined purpose. For years they had worked together in perfect confidence and understanding, interchanging monosyllables. And when at last, on a grey November evening by the gate in the lane the collision came between them, there were no voices raised in anger, no rash statements, no words of abuse on either side. Willie stood throughout resting his elbow on the top of the gate, speaking with complete restraint, and Davie went on "lowsing" his horses with no outward sign of crisis. If you had passed by upon the highroad you would have taken the encounter for a friendly chat, and yet in the course of a few minutes it reached an open breach. The cause of the dispute was never told, but the upshot of it was that Davie must go, and no more need be said. He would have his wages then

and there, and let that be the last of him.

Willie Sproat turned homeward up the lane, gripping his stick a little more firmly than was his wont, considering how he should break the issue to his wife. And Davie carelessly led his team through the gate and closed it after him, flung a leg over the near horse and ambled home reflectively. But there was consternation at Drumshaws that night.

"Ye're never gaun tae pairt wi' Davie?" Mrs Sproat turned sharply from her post at the kitchen range, spoon in hand, doubtful if she had heard aright.

"I am that. He'll be awa' the morn."

"But what in the warld possesst ye tae fa' oot wi' Davie? Ye'll never find his like again, I may tell ye."

"He's a grand worker," Willie admitted judicially, "and a quiet, dacent

man, and clever wi' his horses. But I canna help it. Him or me maun be maister o' the farm: and if he canna tak' a tellin', it's no my blame."

"But, bless me!" Mrs Sproat abandoned the girdle and sat down with an air of helplessness, almost of despair. "The man's been at Drumshaws the best pairt o' thirty year, Willie. He was here before you or me was haird of. Div ee mean tae tell me that——"

"Whisht, Jessie!" said Willie shortly, and closed discussion with his favourite proverb of the country, "Nought said's a grand thing."

And so Drumshaws went to bed in the fond belief that the incident was closed and it only remained for him to find a ploughman. He was in the yard long before daylight, for he must now take over the morning duties of the stable. But as he came out of the

house he saw that the stable door was open and the swinging lantern lit. Davie was quietly moving about foddering his horses, as he had done every morning since the days when his master as a small boy used to fill his buckets for him for the privilege of working the pump handle. Perhaps his master remembered that as he stood for a moment in the doorway. At any rate he came quietly away: Davie was not to be disturbed. It must be a heavy blow to him to part with his horses.

When Willie came out after breakfast he could find neither Davie nor the horses till he went down the lane; and there —to his great surprise—he came upon him ploughing. Davie was turning at the end of the furrow, and he nodded to his master, remarking that it was a wee bit like rain. And he started on his new furrow, bracing himself and call-

ing on his horses. Willie reflected that half a day would finish the field. It was just like Davie, for he never could abide an unfinished job. A good workman and verra anxious, and it was an ill day when he must lose him. . . . He put away these vain regrets and went on to cut the turnips for the sheep. Davie spent the afternoon carting tiles, and when he came in at the darkening, knocked at the back door and asked for a word with the master. Willie was puzzled. Davie could never be going to appeal to him? No, he must have come to say good-bye. . . .

"I'll be gaun tae the smiddy first thing the morn," said Davie, "wi' the mare tae be shod. I was wunnering if I should speak tae Joe Hepburn aboot the auld turnip-cutter. We'd be the better o' them baith, and she's useless as she is. He micht be able tae sort her."

The farmer returned to his tea, wondering how many odds and ends there were to be sorted and put to rights before Davie could see his way to depart. On the following day Davie brought the rest of the tiles from Dalwoodie, put some new stobs in the old fence in the meadow, and sawed up the tree that had been blown down near the burn for firewood. The day after that was given over to thrashing—and the letter that the farmer wrote about a disengaged ploughman that he had heard of was allowed to lie on the chimney-piece. Davie was quite without embarrassment all this time in asking for instructions or announcing his plans. And Willie wondered what exactly was their relation to one another. He did not abandon his theory that Davie was just winding things up before he went till one morning at the end of a fortnight, when he found him quietly

setting to work to plough the Five Acre. It was borne in on him then that Davie had never intended to go, though he would not yet confess the discovery.

"I see ye've come tae terms wi' Davie again," said Mrs Sproat that day. "It's a blessin' he didna tak' ye at yer word. For whatever possesst ye——"

"I've no come tae terms wi' him," said Willie. "He's gaun as soon as things is redd up a bit. . . ."

It was in the glow of satisfaction with which he witnessed the bringing in of the last stook the following September that Willie so far forgot himself as to speak of the dispute. Davie hardly seemed to remember.

"Oh, *yon*?" he said at last, reflectively. "Man, it was a daft thing, yon. But it never made ony differ between us that I could see."

XIX

THE BANKER

The Beatties have always been shepherds and the Beattie girls have always married shepherds. They may be said to be dedicated as a family to the welfare of the Black-faced Sheep, and they always have an unfurnished look to those who know them when they are seen without a collie at their heels. Thus it was that we learned with something of a shock of a case of desertion in the present generation, when Adam, the youngest of the four brothers, left the Valley to take a post in a Glasgow bank. His father tried to put a good face on it: there was generally a weak spot in every family,

he said: and it was a strange thing aboot that laddie—he had never shown a proper understanding of sheep or even a proper respect for their qualities. It was a thing unaccountable in a Beattie. "I tell ye a sheep's nae mair tae him than ony ither beast. He's that taen up wi' buiks and newspapers: I'm thinkin' he must ha' been *born* wantin', puir laddie." We condoled with him, and did our best to make it clear that we should not despair of Adam even if he was a banker.

And Adam prospered in the course of time, and settled at last in Birmingham with a comfortable income and an English wife—both compensations in their way. He came back not long ago to visit us, and it would be idle to deny that we were impressed by him—by his soft felt hat and his city clothes and the sleek little motor which he backed so deftly

into the hay-shed at Thrummie Rigg. Then he got out and went over to the bridge. It was there that I found him, leaning on the parapet, feasting his eyes on the sunlit Valley, completing and fulfilling year-long memories. I was wondering if he was "spoiled," as we say of those who have left the Valley and lost all touch with our view of life. But I was reassured.

"Surely there used to be a little hay-shed on Pitglassie, by the water-side?" he said, when we had shaken hands. "There was always a flycatcher's nest in it."

I told him it was swept away by the flood three years ago.

"I dare say it was pretty rotten by that time," he observed thoughtfully. "And there were three spruce trees——"

But Mrs Cairns was calling to us from her doorstep. We were to come in, she

said, and take a dish of tea before Adam started over the hill, and it was everyway likely that his brother Matthew would come down to meet him. (Matthew is herd of Minnygap hirsel, which is the farthest outpost of Scroggs farm, on the very march of the parish; and Thrummie Rigg is a handy starting-point for the long climb.)

Mrs Cairns' tea-party expanded by degrees, and Adam soon began to lose that "nasty English accent," as we are pleased to call it, which had made him strange to us at first. He was eating dropscones and red-currant jelly with immense delight and gathering news of the Valley, and he seemed to have little to tell us of Birmingham and the banking world. I know we were all feeling that Adam had greatly improved. It looked as if he had turned out a credit to us, after all. But it was strange to see how

slim and pale and neat he looked . . . and he was getting bald (a thing unaccountable in a Beattie) . . . but it was a fine pin he had in his tie. Strange that this should be Adam—strange indeed in contrast with the giant whose form suddenly darkened the doorway as he stretched out a mighty hand.

"Weel, Adam, lad!"

"Weel, Matthew, and hoo's yersel?" The English accent had disappeared.

I am glad to think that the two brothers were well pleased with each other. Matthew sat down and asked after the wife and the bairns and the bank, and Adam inquired if the lambing was well by and whether there were good prospects of meat on the hill. There was no sign of disapproval on either side until the time came to start for home. Adam sprang up and went to the corner where the sticks were kept, and Mrs Cairns

watched him with a tender eye as he tested them one after another and fitted them to his hand. But when Matthew got a full view of him he saw that which wrung from him a cry of dismay—the banker's boots.

"Adam, lad," said he, "what kin' o' parlour pumps div ee ca' yon? Ye'll never can walk the hill in thae bits."

And Adam put up a slender patent-leather toe on the edge of a chair and gravely shook his head at it. Then he went to the window and took a long look up the great gulley that ran like a gash on the heather clear up to the sky-line—the first stage only of the tramp that lay before them. He knew that it was not only his boots that fell short. Walking had been no part of his daily habit for many years. There was a little motor in the shed outside, and Birmingham is well served with electric cars. . . .

Adam had spent a great hour, back among his ain folk, warmed by the surge of old memories and old ties: he had taken a mighty step over the frontiers of his daily life and found again that which he had lost. But a chill had come over him. He felt too small for his part. He was wondering how he could ever get up that hill. The Birmingham bank could not help him now. Years fell away, and he saw himself very clearly as the Beattie lad that had no taste for sheep.

Adam deposited the soft felt hat along with his collar and tie and his umbrella upon the table. These things did not belong to Minnygap. Then he turned up his sleeves and pulled his socks over his trousers and firmly gripped his stick. We all came out into the garden.

"I'm wunnerin', Matthew," said the banker shamefacedly, "if I'll ever reach the tap o' that brae."

"Hoots, laddie, never fear," said Matthew, with a genial grin. "I'll carry ye on ma shouthers sooner than see ye beat."

And so we watched them out of sight.

"It's a braw thing tae get on in the warld," said Hector Mackay sententiously.

Mrs Cairns sighed heavily as she put away his umbrella and his tie-pin—things unaccountable in a Beattie. "It's a peety aboot that laddie," said she.

XX

TWO EXILES

It is not to be supposed that it is through any lack of enterprise or any love of the humdrum life that the Beattie boys are content to follow the patient and secluded calling of the shepherd; nor that Adam, the banker, had shown any special spirit of adventure in going back on the family tradition. For the three remaining brothers—though all are equally devoted to the charge of sheep — are living lives as far removed from one another and amid surroundings as remote as well could be imagined. It is some years now since I received an inquiry from a firm of Liverpool merchants as to

whether I could recommend an unmarried shepherd of good experience, willing to undertake the charge of sheep on a small island in the Southern Atlantic. The terms were generous, but the conditions were, I thought, rather severe. For the island, until the arrival of the shepherd in question, was uninhabited, and he was not to expect any visit from the outside world more than twice or three times in the course of the year. But there was a comfortable hut, and the climate was said to be excellent. It was clearly a case for a Beattie, and I had the good fortune, at the lamb sale at Dalwoodie a week or two later, to find all three brothers together. There we sat on the fence of an empty pen, while I brought out the map that had been sent to me and laid the case before them.

There was no question of refusing the

offer, and the idea of being thus marooned on a little speck in the far waste places of the map did not present itself as a drawback. For a Beattie is only lonely when divorced from his sheep. (Adam must often be lonely, one would say, in the bank!) It was therefore only a question of which of the three should go. Matthew was ruled out as he was a married man, and it was understood in any case that the eldest son belonged to Minnygap. But James and David were free to go.

And so Matthew took two matches from his pocket and broke one of them in halves, and they drew lots for it. David drew the broken match, and James became the shepherd of Shaggy Rock. Matthew got down from his perch as soon as the point was settled.

"Ye'll want a guid dog, Jamie lad," said he. "I'm thinkin' I'll need tae let

ye tak' wee Tibbie here. She's a terrible wise-like beast."

"Aye, I'd like fine tae tak' Tibbie," said James. And that settled the matter of the exile's equipment. He sailed from Liverpool shortly after.

James writes home regularly when occasion offers, but his letters are seldom of much general interest. He always reports the number of "twins following" at the close of the lambing and the general state of the stock. There is a good deal of obscure discussion of the incidence and treatment of peculiar diseases that crop up. There is generally some point on which Matthew is advised to consult the Vet. when next he sees him. (Not that a Beattie ever yet learned anything from a Vet.: it is purely a matter of form.) And there is always detailed news of the dogs, Tibbie and her descendants and successors. But we

have not yet gathered from his letters any idea of Jamie's way of life or frame of mind in that far-distant place. We must suppose that all goes well with him, for there is no word of his coming back.

In one only of his letters had Jamie thrilling news to tell—rather in the spirit of one who, being himself at the heart of things, made haste to enlighten his less fortunate friends living far from the great world in Crashie Howe. For he told how, seated one day on a rock on the heights of his domain, he had witnessed the closing stages of a very famous naval action, far out on the summer sea.

I do not know if David was disappointed that the lot had not fallen upon him, but it so happened that he also left Crashie Howe, and he also is tending sheep within a little hospitable tract of pastur-

age, completely surrounded and cut off, far from the friendly marches of neighbouring farms. Only he does not live in a hut. He lives in lodgings in a narrow street, and goes to and from his work by motor bus. David is in sole charge of a flock of Southdowns in a London park.

I think he is the more lonely of the two, and there is a certain just resentment in his mind from which James is wholly free. Shaggy Rock may have its disadvantages, but, after all, there is no one to blame. It belongs to the order of things: it carries good pasture for stock: it is essential that there should be sheep upon it, and that implies a shepherd. Jamie's exile is just and inevitable. But David is not surrounded by the harmless sea. He is shut in by London, and London from his point of view is a bad neighbour, needlessly in-

terfering at every turn with the proper freedom and dignity, the comfort and the unfettered life of sheep. Jamie is as one who has led his community out into the desert, but David is as one cut off, beleaguered by hostile forces. It is bewildering for a dog to work—even one of Tibbie's pups—in a roar of traffic, when he cannot hear his master's voice. On the wildest stretch of Holmfell David has never lost his way, however thick the mist, but he fumbles aimlessly about in a London fog, misled by distracting sounds and voices, bothered by the sameness of park railings. And he is daily distressed and humiliated by the atrocious colour of his sheep and the soot that clings to him when he handles them.

Still, I don't think David will give up his job. He is enormously impressed with the quality of the pasturage—there are good sheltering trees and no lack of

water. The place would make an incomparable sheep-farm—were it not for London. I fancy him in idle moments dreaming of what it would be if he could get rid of this surrounding incubus and how he would fashion it to his mind. The railings would give place to a dry-stone dyke. He would build the steading on that little knoll by the gate, cut down those two old oaks for stobs for fencing, and when he had enclosed the corner by the house he would break it up to give him turnips for the winter. The flower-beds could be sown with rape. He would have his dipper above the lake; and he would take a crop of hay off the top corner beyond the road. And, finally, he would get rid of these ponderous Southdowns and send to Scotland for some honest Blackfaced ewes. Thus he looks on with unseeing eyes at the passing stream of children and perambulators,

hoops and bowler hats—wondering where in the world in that placid sheep-farm that he has conjured up he is going to find a bog-hole where he can cut his peats.

XXI

THE HERD OF MINNYGAP

The easiest way to approach Minnygap, if you are no great walker, is from the valley of the Dog's Burn, which is a tributary of the Water of Dreep. But it is a very long way round. You must drive down to Waterfoot and then follow the main road west for five miles: then you go up the Dog's Burn by means of a green cart track that bores a way deep into the hills, finally crossing the Holmfell ridge and descending in the Selkirk direction. You will leave your trap just short of the watershed, and, keeping the summit of Holmfell to the left, walk out across moor and bog for some four miles. You

will find yourself at last at the top of a rounded hill, deep in ancient heather and falling steep on the far side, and looking down you will see, three hundred feet below you, a dainty little picture, fitted into the angle at the meeting of two streams. There is a sudden patch of vivid green, looking like sheer velvet in the heart of the shaggy moor, and a cottage, twinkling white in the sun, with a blue wisp of peat reek rising from the chimney. There are a few scrunty old spruce trees, the last survivors of a small plantation, and a wooden bridge and a dusky peat rick by the door. And as you scramble down the steep hillside you are soon aware of a mighty barking of dogs and shrill voices of small children, already flinging out a welcome to you. For you have been signalled from afar.

There is, I believe, another tortuous route from the Dog's Burn, by which

Matthew sometimes, when the moor is dry, brings a cart to Minnygap; but I have never found it. Matthew himself always comes straight up the Scroggs Burn from Thrummie Rigg. But then Matthew never knows when he is going uphill. I am content to go down that way. The many problems of life in this barbarous place yield to his mighty powers of muscle and eyesight. He dominates the mountain-side, annihilating distance, ignoring altitude. With his long, slow, swinging stride he covers the uncounted miles—often a score of them on the ordinary rounds of an uneventful day. He has no share in the many aids to locomotion used by other men. He is hardly to be imagined on a bicycle or in a train. I do not doubt that if he had business in Edinburgh or at Perth he would find it most convenient to walk there. His means of travel may be

slow, but they are certain, and there is always time enough to spare at Minnygap.

Now that he has a wife and family to look after, Matthew has heavy weights to carry, for many of the household supplies go up the hill on his broad shoulders; but he is always ready to divide his load and make an extra journey if need be, for there is always time enough at Minnygap. If he can get his meal across by cart twice in the year and a sack or two of potatoes, he counts himself provisioned, for he always has a cow in the byre that opens off the cottage and some poultry picking round the door.

His powers of distant vision are inherited, and sharpened by long practice; and in the lambing season, when the white speck of a newborn lamb upon a far hillside may be easily mistaken for

a mountain hare, they save him many a mile-long climb. I once took a pair of field-glasses with me to Minnygap, that I might compete with Matthew on level terms, but when I handed them to him he would have no traffic with them.

"Na, na," said he. "A man wad soon ruin his een with thae things. They've spoiled mony a guid herd before this."

"How is that?" said I.

"Once ye learn tae depend on a glass," said he impressively, "ye lose yer powers o' pointed vision. It's a thing that grows on a man like dram-drinkin'."

Matthew never seems to realize that you have come to see him or his family. You have come to see the stock, and he will wait impatiently till you are ready to go with him round the marches. He

will introduce you to any sheep you may point out, with some well-considered words as to her character and constitution, and probably tell you of some incident in her history: and he will discourse of sheep in general, of how wise they are, of how well-ordered is their way of life, and of how each individual among them has her own preferences and habits and special views on choice of herbage, "for all the world like folk." At any given hour of the day he seems to know the whereabouts of any one of them on all that vast expanse of heather. And even in this lonely place he has other things to show you besides sheep. He will trace for you from a hilltop the old line of the Roman road, swept under by the slow tide of bent and heather a thousand years ago. He will point out the place where one of the boys lost his life in the snow, in his

great-grandfather's day, and take you to the gully of the hooded crow, and the finest spring of water in the county. And at last he will bring you to the top of a little purple hill behind the house that bears the proud name of Crown of Scotland, said to be equidistant from Solway, Clyde and Forth.

Minnygap on a fine August day is a little gem of homely beauty. But in the winter so terrible is its isolation and so severe the rigours of its mountain storms that life there seems rather to belong to the annals of an outpost of pioneers than to this country and this age. I sometimes think that James on his Atlantic rock is hardly less forgotten and cut off than that small community in the wilderness. When Matthew had to bring his stock down in the great snow-storm of last winter, his wife and two small children lived for a week in

the eye of the blizzard, imprisoned by the drift, able only to keep an open way to the peat rick a few yards from the door. There was plenty of meal in the house and a side of bacon, and the cow was in milk, so there was no fear of famine. But by the time that Matthew came home the peats were exhausted, and two kitchen chairs had gone to keep the fire alight. It was already dark, and snow was driving ceaselessly past the door, and the frightened children would not stay alone in the house. But Matthew got out his two-handed saw, the children were tethered waiting to the bedposts, pathetic captives, and he and his wife went out into the night and fumbled for a spruce tree by the burn and cut it down, and so brought home their fuel.

Mrs Matthew has told me other stories of frightful struggles with the elements—

not in any spirit of complaint, for she counts the existence of a herd's wife a fine independent life and what "she has always been used with." But to me they gave a strong impression of her strength and courage. There was a night not long ago when the whole family were returning home, after a visit to her mother at Waterfoot. The trap had had an accident on the way up the Dog's Burn Loaning, and they had been late in starting across the moor. Then came rain and mist and darkness and a very deluge. And Matthew, with both children in his arms, felt his way down the dyke to the burn in inky blackness. And the burn was in full flood and the bridge was gone. And he must ford it breast-high, carrying one child at a time, and then go back for his wife, and then grope about the bank to find the children: and so the procession

formed up again and safely reached the door.

"Hoots!" said Mrs Beattie in conclusion. "We jist pit the bairns tae bed and they were nane the waur."

But even Minnygap is not untouched by the changes of these latter days. Jamie had seen his naval battle from his perch on Shaggy Rock, and it so happens that aeroplanes pass now and then along the southern side of the Holmfell Ridge, which falls, no doubt, in the line of flight between two distant points. Thus Minnygap has seen portents in the sky as yet unknown in Crashie Howe itself. I was trying last time that I was there to entertain Mrs Beattie with a discourse upon the wonders of the world. And I was strangely taken aback. Mrs Beattie is rather deaf, and I had repeated more than once with emphasis an explanation of what I meant

by aeroplanes, when suddenly she cut me short.

"Oh, *them*!" she said. "We've seen them mony a time. Me and the bairns is weel aquaint wi' arioplanes."

XXII

A MATTER OF MOMENT

It is generally conceded throughout the neighbourhood of Crashie Howe that our Parish Council, in its quiet way, is a perfectly efficient instrument. Whatever new members may be elected, there is always the Old Guard—the minister, the clerk, and that highly respectable worthy Hector Mackay—to give it ballast and bring to bear the weight of their experience and profound knowledge of precedent. No one dreams of quarrelling with our methods, and the routine of business is carried out to the universal satisfaction. The clockwork regularity of our proceedings gives us a fine sense of solidity, but

they would, not to put too fine a point on it, become, I think, intolerably dull and dreary were it not for the Trust. I do not know exactly why it is that we regard the Trust with so great an affection and so close an interest. It may be its honourable antiquity, for it has been in the hands of our predecessors ever since parish councils existed, or it may be the intrinsic quality of the problems which it presents that appeals to us. But it is quite certain that the dreary, sleep-laden atmosphere of the schoolroom where we meet seems to vanish in a moment as soon as the name Douglas Acre crops up. No one has been taking any special note of the exact eighth of a penny that the clerk has arrived at in his estimate of the education rate, and the latest recommendation from the Board has been received without enthusiasm. Hector is yawning, and

wishing he could light his pipe, and Willie Sproat is almost asleep—he has had a heavy day among the turnips, no doubt—when, with startling suddenness, we are all talking at once; silent men have become eloquent, neutral men have developed strong views, Hector's fist is ringing on the table, and Sproat is taking notes.

For in our list of agenda the tail, so to speak, has dwarfed the dog. It is not the "assessment of rates," or "the consideration of an application from the Parish Council of Dalwoodie anent the upkeep of a pauper," or "the appointment of a finance sub-committee," that has stirred us to our depths in this manner. It is "any other competent business." With us "any other competent business" is but a grandiose expression for the Trust. The whole of the collective affairs of the parish are

regarded in the light of an overture, and at the moment when Hendry, the clerk, blandly inquires if there is "anything further to consider," the curtain is up.

Douglas Acre is a small holding of some ten acres, bringing in an annual gross rent of £13, 12s. 6d. (I believe it was the Parish Council of 1897 that demanded, to its lasting honour, the additional 12s. 6d.) The proceeds were originally to be applied to the maintenance of a blind girl, daughter of the head gamekeeper of the Glencarrick estate, and after her death to the poor of the parish, "not in consideration of their degree of destitution, but of their deserving character and respectability." It will be seen at once that there is fine scope for discussion here. But it is not so much in the distribution of the fund that the trustees are interested as in the manage-

ment of the estate. The selection of a tenant in the first instance, the execution of necessary repairs and improvements —these are the points on which, almost against our will, we grow warm.

But although everything on Douglas Acre—from the cow to the number of tiles necessary to drain the meadow, and whether two- or three-inch tiles should be used — bristles with contentious points, the head and crown of discussion for the last half-dozen years has been the pump, its entire internal economy, and the delicate question of its relation to the water-butt in the corner by the henhouse. I have always maintained, in the face of much opposition, that the pump was badly constructed in its infancy. We are labouring, I contend, year after year to repair inherent defects which can never finally be overcome. In a word, I am for a new pump,

and owed my seat at the last election to the vote and influence of the present tenant upon that distinct understanding. Willie Sproat, who may be regarded as the "Extreme Left," goes even further than I do. In his judgment the pump is wrongly placed. He not only demands a new pump, but a pump ten yards further up the hill. But Willie and I stand alone. Opinion is maturing, convictions are hardening upon the other side. It is too great a plunge. We should find our income reduced in one year to such an extent, we are told, that more than one deserving old woman must content herself with fifteen cwt. of coals, and during our administration we have never yet fallen short of a minimum of twenty. But I think that the strength of the Opposition has its root in a deeper and more subtle cause than that. With a new and perfect pump

at Douglas Acre our meetings would lose their savour, our attendance would fall away, our very powers of eloquence and debate would become feeble and ineffective from disuse. And we are so happy as it is!

"I hae a letter from the tenant o' Douglas Acre," the clerk will announce in his lifeless official voice, though I always imagine him to be chuckling inwardly with anticipation, "compleening o' the state o' the pump."

"Oo," says Hector, innocently. "What ails the pump?"

"I ken fine what it is," cries Tom Little, the cobbler. "I tell't ye the way it would be. It's the sucker."

The minister turns upon him eagerly. "Which sucker div ee mean, Tom?" he inquires.

"The bottom sucker," says Tom, impressively. "Never since I hae been on

this Council hae I said one wurd against the upper sucker."

Then Willie makes a great effort in favour of our lost cause—the cause of the new pump. "Both suckers are rotten," he announces, springing to his feet, "and, mair than that, the haill structure is rotten. It's fair dithering. It's a disgrace to the parish. The man needs his lassie to haud the pump while he works the hannle. And the water's contaminated, and bound to be, the way it's placed. There can be no satisfaction till we move the pump."

"Hoots, Willie," says the minister quietly, and his tirade evokes no further rejoinder.

"I've often notticed," says Hector, "that the lower sucker gets claggit wi' dirt when there's a spate. I think if it was taken oot and thoroughly cleaned——"

"Ay,"—it is an enthusiastic voice from

the corner ready with confirmation and support,—"ay, and wrappit wi' wool, maybe, if it leaks."

"The sucker's past saving," says Tom Little, conclusively. "It must be ten years old. It's my experience that six years is the life of a sucker."

The clerk plunges into a vast dust-coloured ledger that has been occupying most of the available space on the table, and we watch him burrowing among its contents in tense silence. "There's an account here," he reads at last, "dated November 1904, three-and-six paid to Robert Taggart for a new sucker."

"But that was a top sucker!" shouts Tom triumphantly. "Never have I said a wurd against the top sucker."

"Nonsense, man," cries Hector. "Three-and-six for a top sucker! It's clean ridiculous!"

A lively skirmish takes place on this

statement, and the clerk is sent for an old file of receipts, in which, when at last the account is run to earth, it appears that only the size, not the altitude, of the sucker is specified. It is proposed that the maker be interrogated, but some one points out that Bob Taggart died last winter. His wife might know, but his wife has left the neighbourhood. It seems to have reached an *impasse*, when a new bone of contention is flung into our midst by a member who has not yet spoken.

"It's my firm impression," he remarks, "that the suckers was changed over one winter when she wouldna pump owing tae the frost. I seem to mind hearin' o' it, but I couldna say if it was since the new yin was pit in or no."

"I yince reversed the suckers in my ain pump," Hector begins in reminiscent vein, when the clock in the passage strikes.

"Losh," cries the minister, looking at his watch, "it's nine o'clock, and we've been sittin' here three mortal hours! I promised my wife to be home for supper." He rises to his feet. "I beg to move that a sub-committee be appointed to examine the lower sucker of the pump at Douglas Acre, and report."

XXIII

WHEN THE BELGIANS CAME

The Belgians came upon us very suddenly. We never formed any committee or raised any funds; nor indeed, as a parish, did we ever arrive at a decision in the matter. They came driving up the road from Dalwoodie one day in a large wagonette under the charge of Hector Mackay, who sat gravely smoking his pipe on the box. No one knew who they were nor where they were bound for, till Hector carefully unloaded them with their bundles at the bridge and threw them on the hospitality of the parish. It was an exquisite October day; warm sunshine and deep peace rested upon the valley. The hill-

sides flamed with autumn bracken and Crashie Water glittered like silver among its clean grey stones. The dishevelled little company, standing with their grimy, shapeless bundles about their knees, looked round them with tired eyes, drinking in the stillness and tranquillity, after their hot stampede before the invaders' guns and the disordered flight across the Channel.

The first of us to take action in the matter was Mrs Cairns of Thrummie Rigg. Her grandson had run over to tell her that the strangers came from Belgium, and he was sent on at once to Scroggs for large supplies of scones and butter, while Mrs Cairns put on the kettle and cleared the kitchen table, and another messenger set off to the shop for eggs and bacon. And by the time that they were all seated at tea inside the cottage Hector was explaining to the group assembled

on the bridge how it was that he had brought the Belgians here and what he meant to do with them. He had been to stay with his brother in Motherwell, and there had found an immense congestion, in all the public buildings of the town, of Belgian families, an overflow from Glasgow, where they were arriving at the rate of hundreds every day. It was certain that homes would have to be found for them. His brother was on the committee appointed by the Town Clerk, and they had gone down together to meet yet another train-load late in the evening.

"They was maistly wimmen and weans," said Hector, "and I tell ye it was a waesome sicht."

"Puir bodies," murmured Alec Quigley with a long sigh.

"And it cam' into ma heid," Hector went on, "that there was that bit cottage

at Broomsburn standin' empty and we micht manage to find some ither wee howff. So a went tae the secretary o' the commytee and tell't him I wad tak' a wheen o' them back tae Crashie Howe wi' the airly train."

And we accepted our responsibility without further debate.

"We'll pit the one family into your cottage, Broomsburn?" Hector went on.

"Yes, yes," said I.

"And there's the sick-hoose."

The sick-house is the property of the Parish Council. It is a dreary little cottage, on the north side near Peter's Moss, which opens its doors at long intervals to accommodate a tramp who has broken down on our hands, or other unfortunate.

The piping voice of old Hendry, the Parish Clerk, broke in at this suggestion. "There'll need tae be a meetin' o' the

Council called if ye're wantin' the sick-hoose," said he. But he got no hearing: it was not a time for formalities.

We had gravitated by now irresistibly and inevitably to the shop. I suppose we felt the need of a directing hand, and it was not a time for further words. Already the evening was closing in. We put ourselves in the hands of Aggie. I did not learn much of her dispositions that night. For I was soon advised to go home and do my best to furnish the Broomsburn cottage. And Alec was told off as my assistant to go round with a cart and collect a bed or two and some tables and chairs. . . . "Mrs Sproat'll lend ye blankets, Alec"—Aggie was busily stuffing supplies into the cart—"and ye must see and gather some mair pots and pans. (Fetch that poker from the shed, Nellie.) And here's oil and candles. Ye can get a bag o' coals frae

Shortrigg as ye go by. He had a cairt-load in the day. I wad try the Manse for cups and saucers, and dinna forget the knives and forks."

Alec was beginning to move off. . . . "And towels — (pit in a bar o' soap, Nellie)—ye'll get them at the Manse—likely."

"Aye, aye," said Alec, again making a forward move.

"And here's a bit carpet for the floor, Alec. What's that you've got, Maggie? Hauf a bag o' tatties? That's fine. Maybe the puir bodies'll no be used wi' porridge. . . ."

Contributions continued to pour into the cart, but it was already getting late and Alec would wait no longer.

"See if Drumshaws can send up milk in the morning," Aggie called after him as a parting shot.

There was already a light in the Brooms-

burn cottage when I got there; a fire was burning, and my dairymaid was on her knees washing the floor, while the ploughman was clumsily erecting curtains over the front windows. "Wee Toorie had brocht word o' the Belgums comin'," they told me.

The spate of contributions that poured in on that first evening sufficed to give our guests a start in their new life, but it was clear that we could not continue to depend on these haphazard methods. A general meeting of the parish was called forthwith at Broomsburn, with the minister in the chair. Many promises of support were announced. A cheque and an undertaking for supply of weekly rabbits from the laird, milk as required from Drumshaws, a load of peats from Scroggs, a perambulator, two razors, a picture of King Albert, 5 cwt. of potatoes, and the loan of a sewing-machine. But

while it is true that I was appointed treasurer of the fund, and there was much useful and harmonious discussion as to the future, the one important act of the meeting, though it was never clearly expressed in words, was to put the whole affair into the hands of a plenipotentiary who would carry it out to the satisfaction of the parish and call upon us for such assistance as she needed.

Aggie Armstrong opened a subscription list, organized a concert in aid of the fund, herself looked after the household supplies in just quantities, and handed over to her sister the conduct of the clothing department, and whenever anything was needed, from an umbrella to a pair of scissors, or an ironing-board, she would find some one among her stream of customers that could supply it.

"That reminds me, Jessie," she would say in her quiet way, as she handed

over the little pile of parcels, "ye micht bring me doon that wee wudden cradle o' yours. There's one o' thae Belgum weans is wantin' a cradle, and ye'll no be needin' it again noo the bairns is gettin' up."

It was not long before the two men found work on the roads, and after that their families were almost self-supporting; but still the kindly flow of contributions went on in a small way through the shop, and Aggie never quite gave up her office.

There was no doubt that Hector Mackay had scored the success of his life in bringing the Belgians to Crashie Howe. The parish awoke the next morning with the single determination to give them warm welcome, and at first it was disheartening and rather chilling to observe the failures that we made to overcome the barrier of language. The minister had some little success with

French, and it is not to be denied that our respect for him was enhanced by the discovery that he could freely express himself in that tongue. But the rest of us laboured heavily.

This difficulty, however, did not trouble the Belgian children. They all went off to school on the first morning without a sign of reluctance, escorted by a shame-faced bodyguard from the neighbouring cottages: and there it is not too much to say that they scored a *succès fou*. Our boys and girls do not, of course, come back from school together. First you will meet the vanguard, composed entirely of boys, and then some hundreds of yards behind, as becomes the weaker sex, a phalanx of girls. It was to be observed that on the very first day the claims of sex triumphed over nationality. In the first division I noticed Eugène busily punching the red head of the

blacksmith's boy, and in the second Juliette in the centre of an admiring line of small lassies, which stretched arm-in-arm right across the road. It immediately became a proud distinction to walk home arm-in-arm with a Belgian.

That afternoon I paid my first call upon the family in my own cottage, and we conversed by nods and winks and signs—also by drawing a picture of a cow to convey information about milk, and by making a pantomime of drinking to show which was the best water supply. But our side was always at a disadvantage in these conversations by signs. We were not at all good at it, and a sense of shame was upon us when we puffed imaginary cigarettes or swept the floor with an invisible broom. Whereas our guests conveyed their meaning much more deftly and with great amusement. Some

of us tried pidgin-English, and it became a common thing to greet them with the words "Plenty fine day," but I never could see how that was going to help us out. It was not long, however, before a splendid discovery was made, namely, that many of the Flemish words were the same as our own; and after that we pounded along in the broadest Scotch and every now and then struck a point of contact. The first real bond of understanding between us was found in the mutual word *Sape*. Then we felt we held a key: we could always start a conversation with some remark about the soap. And gradually the barrier between us wore away.

Above all, Tibbie Johnstone, my dairymaid, who took complete charge of the Broomsburn family, showed extraordinary talent for opening up avenues of understanding. I used to find lists of Flemish

words on odd scraps of paper all over the kitchen, and after a while I would listen to conversations between her and Madame Bogaerts which ran fluently on in a happy medley of tongues. Tibbie became so engrossed in the study that she even perverted for a time her native speech, and when I found them chatting together one day she looked up and addressed me also in the new *patois*. "She's worrit aboot her brither that's wounded. I tellt her I wad frag ye tae screeven a breef." I gathered that by that she meant she would ask me to write a letter.

I wonder if, now all is over, there will not remain some interchange of words between Scotland and Belgium as a relic of the years of exile. It happens that all the male servants on my farm are called John, and I note that we have adopted the habit of distinguishing the

boy by the name of Kleine John. And when I went over to the sick-house the other evening to visit M. Beauprez, he appeared himself at the door, and his first words were, as he ushered me in, "Come ben, Monsieur; come awa' ben!"

Centuries ago we in Scotland learned from an exiled Frenchman to call our leg of mutton a gigot. Is it not possible that years hence the Belgian at his hospitable door will bid the arriving guest "Come ben"?

But old Wattie Hepburn, the dyker, did not wait for words to express his cordial welcome. On the first morning after the arrival of the Belgians he dressed himself in his Sunday clothes, put on his tall hat—which had never before been seen at large, except at funerals—armed himself with his umbrella (though there was not a cloud in the sky) and a

pair of gloves, and strode solemnly up the road to Broomsburn. He would address no word to any passer-by, for he was wholly set upon his mission. He found the tenants of the sick-house on a visit to the family at Broomsburn, which was fortunate, as they were all together by the door at his approach. I think his salute would have lost something in weight and dignity by repetition. He drew himself up before them in the road, gazed upon them for a moment with a kindly eye, and with a slow and stately gesture solemnly raised his hat —and they smiled back at him delightedly. Then he turned homeward, his duty done.

It had no doubt been an effort. I found him sitting on the gate just round the corner with his hat on the top of the dyke beside him, wearily wiping his brow; and he was glad to tell me all about it.

"I canna speak to them by word o' mouth," he said. "But I couldna bear tae stand aside. That was my recognition."